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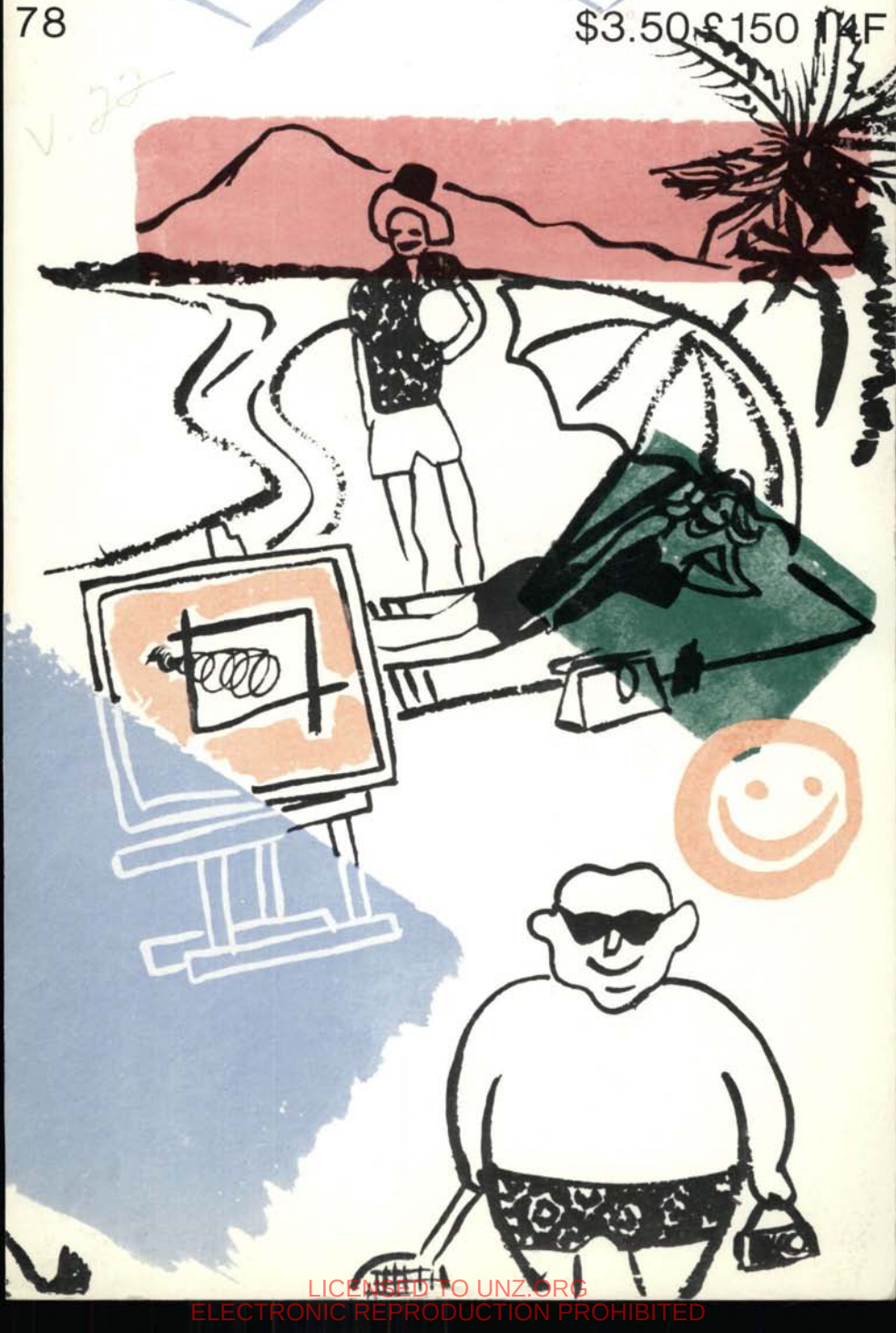

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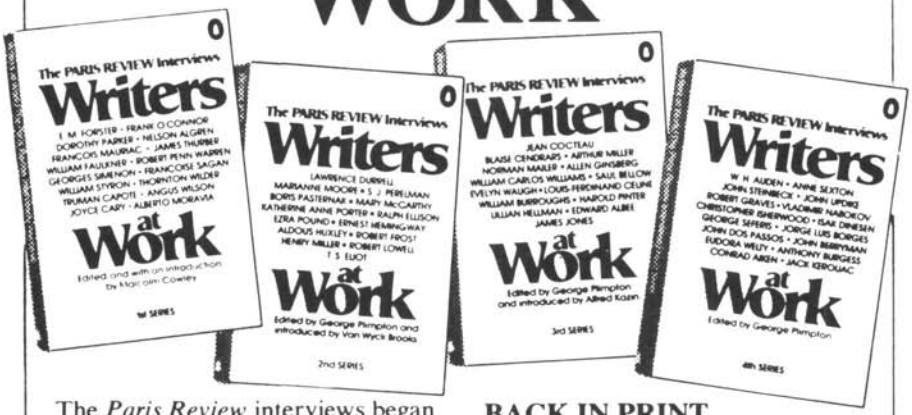

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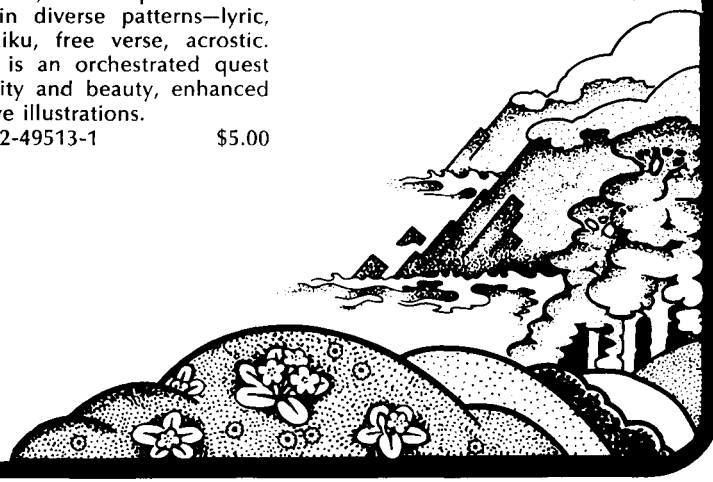

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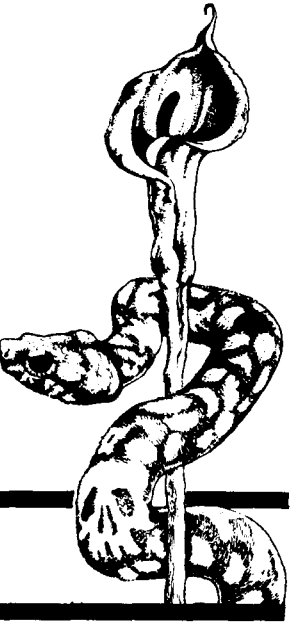

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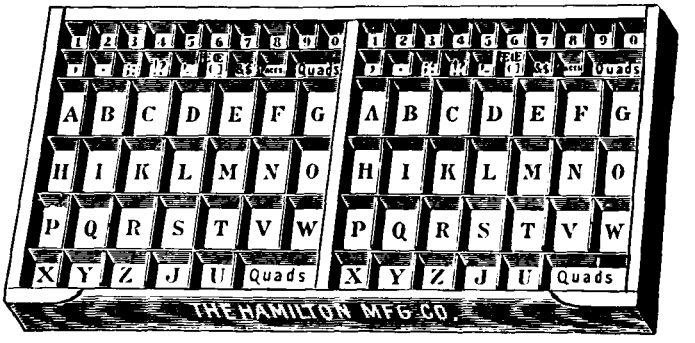

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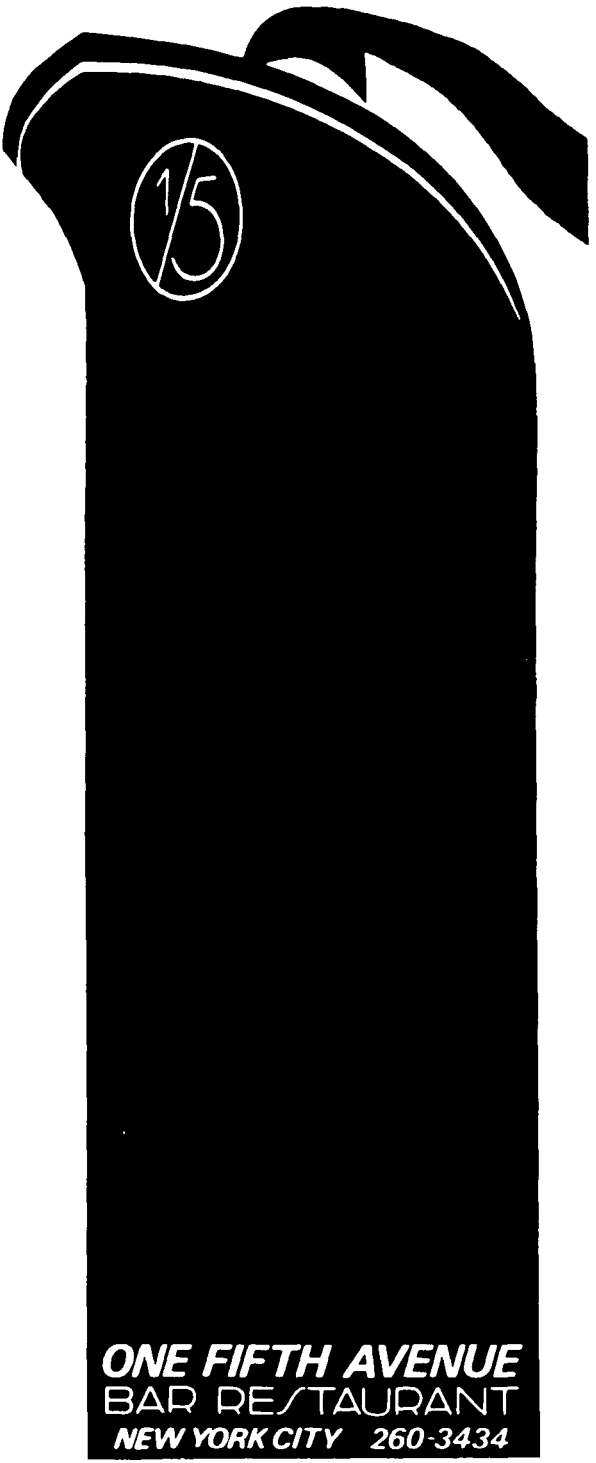

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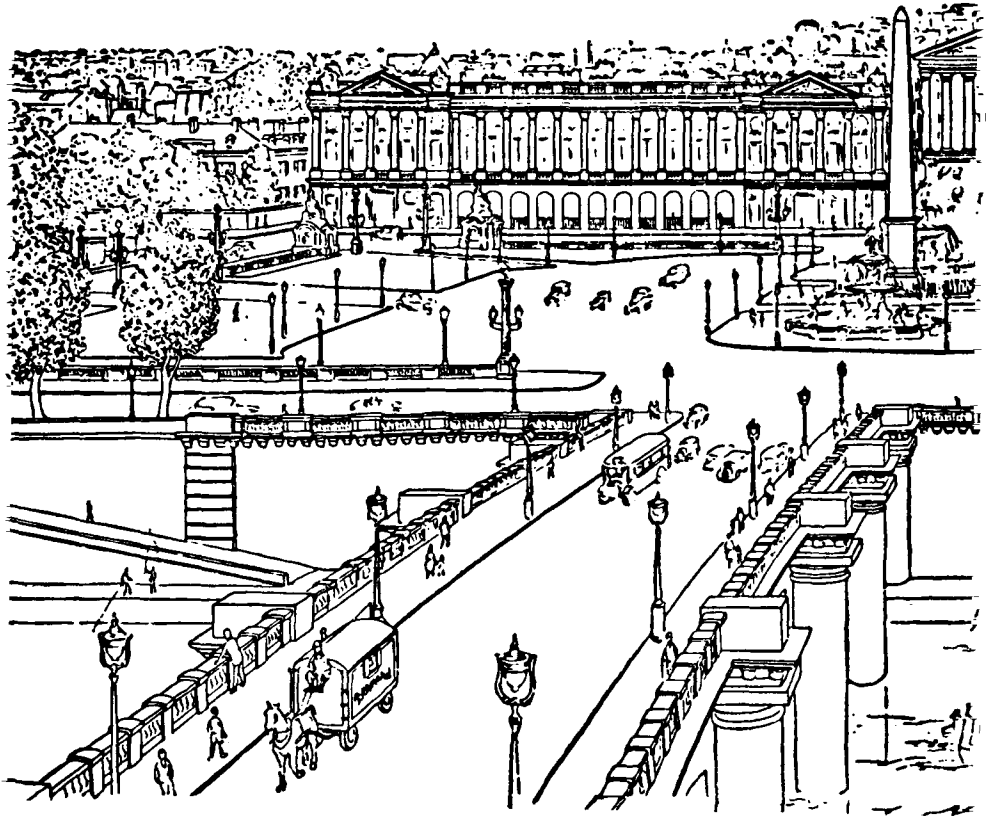

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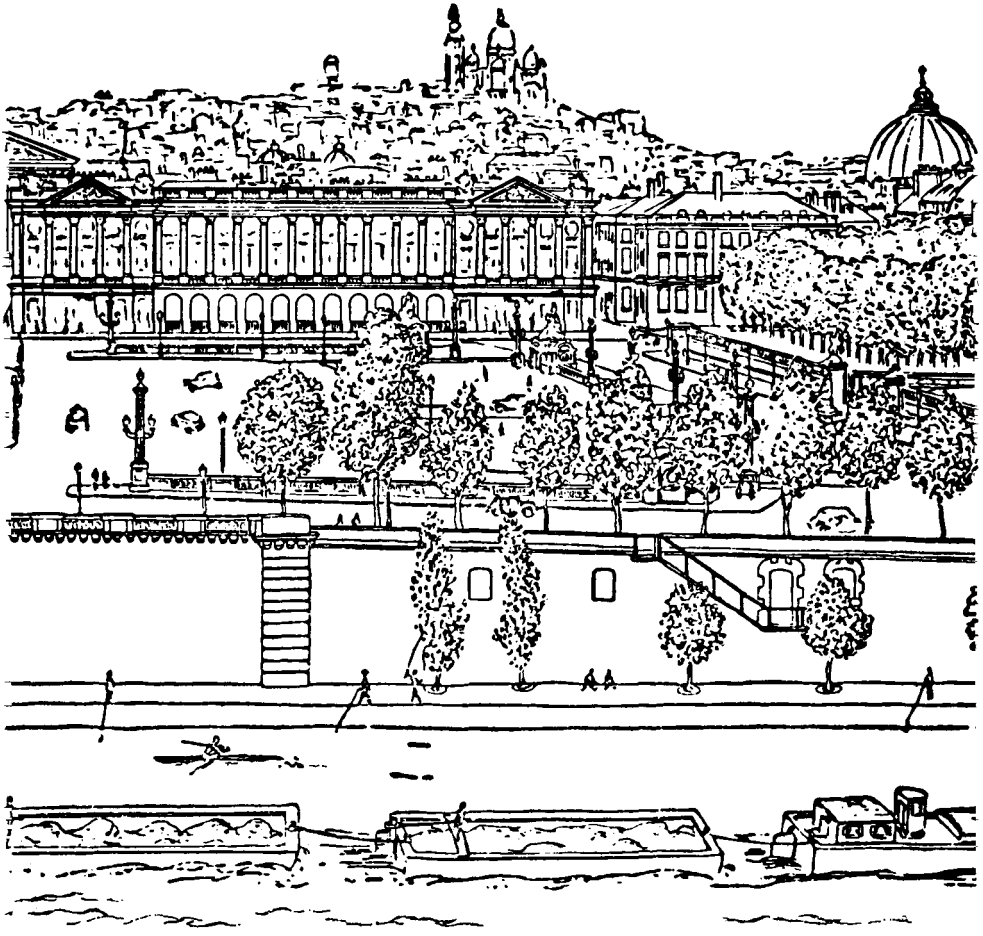

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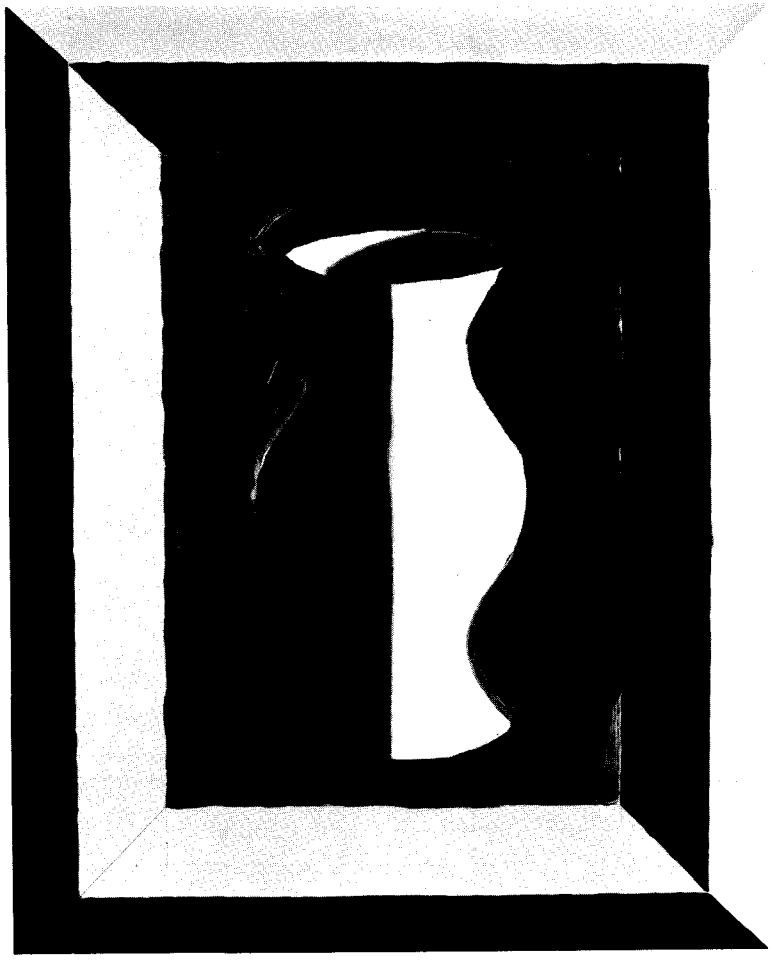

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Mungo Among The Moors

T. Coraghessan Boyle

1. SOFT WHITE UNDERBELLY

At an age when most young Scotsmen were lifting skirts, plowing furrows and spreading seed, Mungo Park was displaying his bare buttocks to Ali Ibn Haj' Fatoudi, emir of Ludamar. The year was 1795. George III was dabbing the walls of Buckingham Palace with his own excrement, the Notables were botching things in France, Goya was deaf, DeQuincey a depraved pre-adolescent. George Bryan "Beau" Brummell was smoothing down his first starched collar, young Ludwig van Beethoven, beetle-browed and twenty-four, was wowing them in Vienna with his Piano Concerto No. 2, and Ned Rise was drinking Strip-Me-Naked with Nan Punt and Sally Sebum at the Pig & Pox Tavern in Maiden Lane.

Ali was a Moor. He sat cross-legged on a damask pillow and scrutinized the pale puckered nates with the air of an epicure examining a fly in his vichyssoise. His voice was like sand.

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"Turn over," he said. Mungo was a Scotsman. He knelt on a reed mat, trousers around his knees, and glanced over his shoulder at Ali. He was looking for the Niger River. "Turn over," Ali repeated. While Mungo was congenial and quick-to-please, his Arabic was somewhat sketchy. When he failed to respond a second time, Dassoud—Ali's henchman and human jackal—stepped forward with a lash comprised of the caudal appendages of half a dozen wildebeests. The tufted tails cut the air, beating on high like the wings of angels. The temperature outside Ali's tent was 127° Fahrenheit. The tent was a warp and woof affair, constructed of thread spun from the hair of goats. Inside it was 112°. The lash fell. Mungo turned over.

Here he was white too: white as sheets and blizzards. Ali and his circle were astonished all over again. "His mother dipped him in milk," someone said. "Count his fingers and toes!" shouted another. Women and children crowded the tent's entrance, goats bleated, camels coughed and coupled, someone was hawking figs. A hundred voices intertwined like a congeries of footpaths, walks, lowroads and highroads—which one to take?—and all in Arabic, mystifying, rapid, harsh, the language of the Prophet. "La-la-la-la-la!" a woman shrieked. The others took it up, an excoriating falsetto. "La-la-la-la-la!" Mungo's penis, also white, shrank into his body.

Beyond the blank wall of the tent was the camp at Benowm, Ali's winter residence. Three hundred parched and blistered miles beyond that lay the north bank of the River Niger, a river no European had ever laid eyes upon. Not that Europeans weren't interested. Herodotus was exercised about its course five centuries Before Christ. Big, he concluded. But tributary to the Nile. El Edrisi populated its banks with strange and mythical creatures—the vermicular Strapfeet, who crawled rather than walked and spoke the language of serpents, the sphinx and harpy, the mantichore with its lion's torso and scorpion's tail and its nasty predilection for human

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flesh. Pliny the Elder painted it gold and christened it black, and Alexander's scouts inflamed him with tales of the river of rivers where lords and ladies sat in gardens of lotus and drank from cups of hammered gold. And now, at the end of the Age of Enlightenment and the beginning of the Age of Imbursement, France wanted the Niger, Britain wanted it, Holland, Portugal, and Denmark. According to the most recent and reliable information—Ptolemy's Geography—the Niger lay between Nigritia, land of the blacks, and the Great Desert. As it turned out, Ptolemy was right on target. But no one had yet been able to survive the sear blast of the Sahara or the rank fever-belt of the Gambia to bear him out.

Then, in 1788, a group of distinguished geographers, botanists, philanderers and other seekers after the truth, met at the St. Alban's Tavern, Pall Mall, to form the African Association. Their purpose was to open up Africa to exploration. North Africa was a piece of cake. They had it staked out, mapped, labeled, dissected and distributed by 1790. But West Africa remained a mystery. At the heart of the mystery was the Niger. In its inaugural year the Association commissioned an expedition headed up by John Ledyard. He was to begin in Egypt, traverse the Sahara, and discover the course of the Niger. Ledyard was an American. He played the violin and suffered from strabismus. He'd been across the Pacific with Cook, into the Andes, through Siberia to Yakutsk on foot. I've tramped the world under my feet, he said, laughed at fear, derided danger. Through hordes of savages, over parching deserts, the freezing north, the everlasting ice and stormy seas have I passed without harm. How good is my God! Two weeks after landing at Cairo he died of dysentery. Simon Lucas, Oriental interpreter for the Court of St. James, was next. He landed at Tripoli, hiked 100 miles into the desert, developed blisters, thirst and anxiety, and returned without accomplishing anything other than the expenditure of £1250. And then there was Major Daniel Houghton. He was an Irishman, bankrupt, fifty-two years of age. He knew nothing of Africa whatever, but he came cheap.

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I'll do it for three-hunnert pund, he said. And a case o' Scots whisky. Houghton sallied up the Gambia in a dugout canoe, drank from fetid puddles and ate monkey meat, and through sheer grit and force of intoxication survived typhus, malaria, loiasis, leprosy and spotted fever. Unfortunately, the Moors of Ludamar stripped him naked and staked him out on the crest of a dune. Where he died.

Mungo stood to hitch up his pants. Dassoud knocked him down. The ululations of the women were fanning the crowd to a frenzy. "Eat pig, Christian," they shouted. "Eat pig." Mungo didn't like their attitude. Nor did he like exposing his prat in mixed company. But there was nothing to be done about it: they'd cut his throat and bleach his bones at the least show of resistance.

Suddenly Dassoud had a dirk in his hand: narrow as an icepick, dark as blood. "Infidel dog!" he shrieked, veins tessellating his throat. Ali watched from behind the folds of his burnoose, dark and impassive. The temperature inside the tent rose to 120°. The crowd held its breath. Then Dassoud leveled the blade at the explorer, gibbering all the while, like some rabid anatomist lecturing on the eccentricities of the human form. The point of the blade drew closer, Ali spat in the sand, Dassoud exhorted the crowd, Mungo froze. Then the blade pricked him — ever so lightly — down below, where he was softest, and whitest. Dassoud laughed like a brook gone dry. The crowd whistled and shrieked. It was then that a grizzled Bushreen with spittle in his beard and an empty eye-socket burst through the press to push Dassoud aside. "The eyes!" he howled. "Look at the devil's eyes!"

Dassoud looked. The sadistic gloat gave way to a look of horror and indignation. "The eyes of a cat," he hissed. "We must put them out."

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2. ERE HALF MY DAYS

The machine for extinguishing sight consists of two strips of brass and looks something like an inverted chastity belt. One strip circles the head at eye-level, the other fits snugly over the crown. There are two screws involved: each has a convex disk attached to the working end. The device was originally fabricated in the ninth century for Usuman dan Fodio, the blind Bashaw of Tripoli. Insecure about his infirmity, the Bashaw decreed that all who desired to come into his presence must first submit to having their eyes put out. He was a very lonely man. The machine operates on the same principle as a vise. The screws are twisted until they meet the surface of the eye, and are then tightened, crank by crank, until the cornea bursts. Simple, inexorable, final.

A hush has fallen over the crowd. A moment earlier they'd been on the brink of hysteria, razzing and gibbering like the hoi polloi at a bull-baiting or a freak show. But now: silence. Flies saw away at the hot still air, and the sound of a goat or camel making water in the sand is like the boom of a cataract. Sandals shuffle, a man scratches his beard. Many have drawn rags over their faces, as if to escape the contamination of the explorer's gaze. Dassoud and the one-eyed interloper stare down at him, arms akimbo, faces solemn.

Mungo has had difficulty grasping the gist of the proceedings. He is reasonably certain that he has pinned down one word at least—the word for eye, *unya*—which he recalls from *Ouzel's Arabic Grammar* ("We lift up our *unyas* to heaven wherein Allah resides"). But why on earth would they be nattering about eyes? And the sudden hush—he wonders about that too. But it is hot, beastly hot, and he can hardly keep his mind on anything at all. So hot in fact that it surpasses anything in his experience, with the possible exception of the Swedish Baths off Grosvenor Square. Sir Joseph Banks, Chairman of the African Association, had taken him to the baths one afternoon to iron out some of the details of Mungo's drive for the Niger. There they had been subjected

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to the emanations of baked stones, stones hot as the earth's core—or so they seemed. An attendant thrashed them with birch switches and buffeted their kidneys and backbones with the sharp heels of his hands. Sir Joseph seemed to find the whole operation invigorating. The explorer nearly lost consciousness. He is beginning to experience the same sort of lightheadedness at the moment, in fact. And small wonder, when you consider that not only must he contend with the sun, sand fleas, dysentery and fever, but with inanition as well. The Moors have confiscated his supplies, appropriated his horse and interpreter, and apparently decided to put him on a stringent diet. Too stringent, by his way of thinking: he hasn't seen a scrap of food in two days.

And so, despite the critical situation and the ring of strange hostile faces, Mungo begins to feel giddy—almost as if he'd drunk too much claret or gill ale. He glances round at the furtive eyes and knitted brows, at the beards and burnooses, the prophets' robes and pilgrims' sandals, and suddenly all those hard minatory faces begin to melt, lose their contours, droop into vagueness like figures of wax. The whole thing is a masquerade, is what it is. Dassoud and One-Eye are tumblers or fire-eaters, and Old Ali is only Grimaldi—Grimaldi the clown. But now they're fitting something over his head. . . a helmet? Do they expect him to go to battle for them? Or have they finally come to their senses and decided to measure him for a crown?

The explorer grins stupidly beneath the brazen cap. His eyes are gray. Gray as the tentative fingers of ice that reach out over the deep pools of the Tweed on a frosty morning. Ailie once compared them to the lovers' wells at Galashiels, and then shook the pennies from her purse and propped them against his eyelids as he lay back in the heather. Gloucester's eyes, they say, were gray. Oedipus's were black as olives. And Milton's—Milton's were like bluejays scrabbling in the snow. Dassoud knows nothing of Shakespeare, Sophocles or Milton. His rough fingers twist the screws. The explorer grins. Oblivious. The onlookers,

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horrified at his mad composure, turn away in panic. He can hear them rushing off, the slap of their sandals on the baked earth...but what's this?—he seems to have something caught in his eye...

3. CORRECTIVE SURGERY

"Stop!"

Mungo can't see a thing (the cap seems to have a visor, and every time he goes to lift it a hand seizes his wrist), but he recognizes the voice instantly. It is Johnson. Jolly old Johnson, his interpreter, come to the rescue.

"Stop!" the voice of Johnson repeats, before pitching headlong into the spillway of Arabic aspirates and fricatives. Dassoud answers him, then One-Eye harmonizes with a concatenation of clicks and grunts, his voice pitched high. Johnson rebuts. And then Ali's voice sounds from the corner, harsh and grainy. There is the sound of a blow, and Johnson tumbles to the mat beside the explorer.

"Mr. Park," Johnson whispers. "What you got that thing on your head for? Don't you realize what they doing to you?"

"Johnson, jolly old Johnson. How good to hear your voice."

"They putting out your eyes, Mr. Park."

"How's that?"

"The chief jackal here he says you got the eyes of a cat—and apparently that don't go down too good around here, as they is presently engaged in grinding them out. If it wasn't for my fortuitous intercession I'd lay odds you'd be blind as a beggar this very minute."

Mungo's head clears like a hazy morning giving way to noon. As it does so he becomes increasingly agitated, until finally he leaps to his feet, tearing at the brazen cap and wailing like a ship in distress. Dassoud knocks him down. Cracks the wildebeest whip a time or two and then calls out in Arabic for some further instrument of torture. There is the sound of padding feet, the swish of the tent flap, and then,

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close at hand, the cry of a human being in mortal agony. It seems to be emanating from Johnson. The explorer is alarmed, and tugs at the cap with renewed vigor, feeling very much like a ten-year-old with his head caught between the bars of an iron railing. "Johnson," he gasps, "—what have they done to you?"

"Nothing yet. But they just sent out for a two-edge bilbo."

The cap finally releases its grip, heaving up from the explorer's head like the cork from a bottle of spumante. He blinks and looks around him. Ali, Dassoud and One-Eye crouch in the far corner, jabbering and gesticulating. The mob is gone and the flap of the tent drawn closed. A massive black man in turban and striped robe blocks the entrance, arms folded across his chest. "A bilbo? What does that mean?" Mungo whispers.

"Means we going to be two monkeys—see no evil, speak none either. They say I got the tongue of a shrike, Mr. Park. They going to cut it out."

4. A.K.A. KATUNGA OYO

Concerning Johnson. He is a member of the Mandingo tribe, they who inhabit the headwaters of the Gambia and Senegal rivers and most of the Niger Valley as far as the city of legend, Timbuktu. His mother did not name him Johnson. She called him Katunga—Katunga Oyo—after his paternal grandfather. At the age of thirteen Johnson was kidnapped by Foulah herdsmen while celebrating the nubility of a tender young sylph in a cornfield just outside his native village of Dindikoo. The sylph's name was Nealee. The Foulahs didn't ask. Their chieftan, who took a fancy to Nealee's facial tattoos and to other features as well, retained her as his personal concubine. Johnson was sold to a *slatee,* or travelling slave merchant, who shackled his ankles and drove him, along with sixty-two others, to the coast. Forty-nine made it. There he was sold to an American slaver who

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chained him in the hold of a schooner bound for South Carolina. The boy beside him, a Bobo from Djenné, had been dead for six days when the ship landed at Charleston.

For twelve years Johnson worked as a field hand on the plantation of Sir Reginald Durfeys, Bart. Then he was promoted to house-servant. Three years later Sir Reginald himself visited the Carolinas, took a liking to Johnson, and brought him back to London as his valet. This was in 1771. The Colonies had not yet broken away, slavery was still sanctioned in England, George III was already harboring the spirochetes that would cost him his sanity, and Napoleon was storming the palisades of his playpen.

Johnson, as he was christened by Sir Reginald, began to educate himself in the library at Piltdown, the Durfey's country estate. He learned Greek and Latin. He read the Ancients. He read the Moderns. He read Smollett, Ben Jonson, Molière, Swift. He spoke of Pope as if he'd known him personally, denigrated the puerility of Richardson, and was so taken with Fielding that he actually attempted a Mandingo translation of *Amelia*. Durfeys was fascinated with him. Not only with his command of language and literature, but with his recollections of the dark continent as well. It got to the point where the Baronet couldn't drift off at night without a cup of hot milk and garlic, and the soothing basso profondo of Johnson's voice as he narrated a tale of thatched huts, leopards and hyenas, of volcanoes spewing fire across the sky, of thighs and buttocks glistening with sweat and black as a dream of the womb. Sir Reginald allowed him a liberal salary, and after emancipation in 1772 offered him a handsome pension to stay on as valet. Johnson considered the proposal over a glass of sherry in Sir Reginald's study. Then he grinned, and hit the Baronet for a raise.

When Parliament was in session Sir Reginald moved his establishment to town, accompanied by Johnson and a pair of liveried footmen. London was a ripe tomato. Johnson was a macaroni. He strutted down Bond Street with the best of them, decked out in his top hat, wasp-waisted coat and boots

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of Morocco leather. Soon he was frequenting the coffee houses, engaging in rapartee, learning to turn an epigram with a barb in it. One afternoon a red-faced gentleman with mutton-chop sideburns called him "a damned hottentot nigger" and invited him to fight for his life. The following morning, at dawn and in the presence of seconds, Johnson put a bullet through the gentleman's right eye. The gentleman died instantly and Johnson was incarcerated. He was subsequently sentenced to be hung by the neck until dead. Sir Reginald exerted his influence. The sentence was commuted to transportation.

And so, in January of 1790 Johnson's ankles were again shackled, spoiling the press of his trousers. He was put aboard the H.M.S. Feckless and deposited at Goree, on the west coast of Africa, where he was to serve as a private in the military. When he stepped ashore an ancient thrill went through him. He was home. Two weeks later, while on late watch, Johnson melted into the black bank of the jungle. He then made his way back to Dindikoo, where he married Nealee's younger sister and settled in to repopulate the village.

He was forty-seven. His hair was salted with gray. The trees climbed into the sky and dawn came like a blanket of flowers. By night there was the shriek of the hyrax and the cough of the leopard; by day the slow drowse of the honeybee. His mother was an old woman now, her face cracked and dried like the faces of the mummified corpses he'd seen in the desert—the slaves who hadn't made it. She pressed him to her bones and clicked her tongue. It rained. Crops grew, goats fattened. He lived in a hut, went barefoot, wrapped a strip of broadcloth round his chest and loins and called it a toga. He gave himself over to sensuality.

Within five years Johnson was providing for three wives and eleven children—fourteen mouths—plus an assortment of dogs, simians, kit foxes and skinks. Still, he wasn't exactly working himself to the bone; instead he cashed in on his reputation as a man of letters. Villagers would come to him

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with a calabash of beer or a side of kudu and ask him to scribble off a few words in return. Each wore a *saphie*—a leather pouch the size of billfold—round his neck or wrist. These *saphies* were the repositories of fetishes, charms against calamity—a pickled ring finger was considered proof against the bite of the boomslang; a hank of hair guaranteed immunity from mutilation in battle; the musk gland of the civet cat prevented yaws and leprosy. But Logos was the supreme charm. The written word could bring wisdom, sexual potency, plenty in times of want. It could restore lost hair, cure cancer, attract women and kill locusts. Johnson was quick to realize the market potential of his penmanship. He would scribble off a line or two of doggerel in exchange for three pounds of honey or a month's supply of grain. Or he'd quote Pope and purchase a pair of gold anklets for his youngest bride:

> Three catcalls be the bribe
> Of him, who chattering shames the Monkey tribe:
> And his this Drum, whose hoarse heroic bass
> Drowns the loud clarion of the braying Ass.

She was fifteen, and demonstrative in her appreciation. Johnson lay back and relished, the whole thing sweet as a fiction. *Paradise Regained*, he thought.

Then one afternoon a runner came from Pisania, the British trading colony on the Gambia. He carried a letter from England sealed with the Durfeys' coat-of-arms (a goat ruminant). England—the clubs, the theatre, Covent Garden and Pall Mall, the sweep of the Thames, the texture of the late afternoon light in the library at Piltdown—it all rushed back on him. He tore open the envelope.

Piltdown. 21 May, 1795.

My Dear Johnson:

If this missive should reach you, I trust it finds you in good health. I must confess that the news of your elope-

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ment from Goree pleased us all immensely. I rather suspect you've "gone native" with a few of those honey-complected sirens you were forever rhapsodizing, what?

But to business. This letter is by means of introducing one Mungo Park, the young Scot we've commissioned to penetrate to the interior of your country and discover the course of the Niger. If you will consent to act as guide and interpreter for Mr. Park, you may name your price.

Yours in Geographical Fervor,

Sir Reginald Durfeys, Bart.
Founding Member
African Association

Johnson's price was the complete works of Shakespeare, in folio volumes, just as they had appeared on the shelves of Sir Reginald's library. He packed a bag, travelled to Pisania on foot, sought out the explorer and drafted an agreement of terms of service. The explorer was twenty-four. His hair was cornsilk. He was six feet tall and walked as if a stick were strapped to his back. He took hold of Johnson's hand in an enormous buttery fist. "Johnson," he said, "I am truly pleased to make your acquaintance." Johnson was five-four, two-hundred-ten pounds. His hair was a dust mop, his feet were bare, he wore a gold straight pin through his right nostril. "The pleasure is mine," he said.

They set off on foot. Upriver, at Frookaboo, the explorer stopped to purchase a horse. The horse was owned by a Mandingo salt merchant. "A real bargain," he said, "for such a frisky colt." They found the animal tethered behind a wattle hut at the far end of the village. It stood in a cluster of chickens, munching thistles and blinking at them. "Splendid teeth," said the salt merchant. The horse was no bigger than a shetland pony, blind in one eye, and emaciated the way very old men are. Open ulcers, green with flies, spangled the right flank, and a yellowish fluid, like thin porridge, drooled from the nostrils. But perhaps worst of all, the animal was given to senile farting—great gaseous exhalations that swept

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the sun from the sky and made all the world a sink. "Rocinante!" Johnson quipped. The allusion was lost on Mungo the explorer. He bought the horse.

Mungo rode, Johnson walked. They passed through the kingdoms of Serawooli and Bondu without incident, but found on entering Kaarta that the king of that country, Tiggitty Sego, was at war with the neighboring state of Bambarra. The explorer suggested a detour to the north, through Ludamar. Two days after crossing the border they were accosted by thirty Moors on horseback. The Moors looked as if they'd just cooked and eaten their mothers. They carried muskets, dirks and scimitars—scimitars cold and cruel as the crescent moon, weapons that hacked rather than thrust: a single blow could remove a limb, separate a shoulder, cleave a head. Their leader, a hooded giant with a hyphenated scar across the bridge of his nose, trotted forward and spat in the sand. "You will accompany us to the camp of Ali at Benowm," he said. Johnson tugged at the explorer's puttees and whispered in his ear. The horses stamped and stuttered. Mungo looked up at the grim faces, smiled, and announced in English that he would be delighted to accept their invitation.

5. FATIMA

A boy bursts into the tent, double-edged bilbo in hand. Dassoud leers, Johnson shudders. Mungo scrambles to his feet, pulls up his trousers and buckles his belt. "I'd like to know just what crime we've—" he begins. Dassoud knocks him down. At that moment a second boy darts into the tent with a message for Ali. Dassoud turns back to his companions and a frenetic colloquy ensues. Fingers are shaken, arms waved, beards pulled. Through it all the explorer can make out a single word, repeated again and again, as if it were an incantation: Fatima, Fatima, Fatima. Keeping his eyes fixed on the conferees, he snakes out a hand to tug at Johnson's toga. "Johnson," he whispers. "What's up?"

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Johnson's eyes are wide. "Shhh!" he says.

A moment later Ali rises. One-Eye takes up the damask pillow, Dassoud flings down the bilbo in disgust, and the three stalk out of the tent. Explorer and guide are left alone with the Nubian sentry. And the sand fleas.

"Pssst. Johnson," Mungo whispers. "What's this Fatima business they're jabbering about?"

"Beats the hell out of me. But whatever it is you can bet it's nothing to lose your senses over."

6. THE SAHEL

The Sahel is a strip of semi-arid land girding West Africa like a waistband, stretching from the Atlantic coast in the west to Lake Chad in the east. Above it lies the Great Desert; below, the rain forests of tropical Africa. Its northernmost fringes give way to steppe, baked and blanched, and then to the dunes and ergs of the Great Desert itself. To the south, the Sahel becomes savannah, lush with seas of blue-green grass from June to October, the months of the monsoon. During these months Ali Ibn Haj' Fatoudi moves his herds of goats and cattle, his people, tents, wives and milk-fed horses to the north, pressing the green line to its limits. From November to June he moves southward as the fierce harmattan winds shriek out of the desert with claws of flying sand, leaching the moisture from the air, the shrubs, the eyes and throats of his herds and his tribesmen. The sad truth is, Ali's herds overgraze the northern Sahel. His cows crop the grass before it's had a chance to germinate, his goats tear it up by the roots. Each year Ali drifts farther south, a mile here, a mile there. In two hundred years Benowm will be desert. The great ergs, Iguidi and Ehech, flow with the wind, drifting, stretching out tongues, fingers and arms, beckoning and beleaguering.

It's a drag, life on the Sahel, let's face it. Talk of scarcity and want, whims of nature: welcome to them. Talk of years when the rains won't come and the sweet bleating herds

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build monuments of bone to the sun. Or a well that goes salt, sandstorms that shear the whiskers from your cheeks. Then there are the hyenas—making off in the night with kids and goats, disemboweling them and leaving the pissed-on remains for vultures and jackals. And then there's the push south: the farther you go, the greater the risk of a sneak attack by the Foulahs or the Serawoolies. That'd be a fine thing. Your people in chains, cattle butchered, horses raped, kouskous devoured. Of necessity, life is lean. And portable. The entire camp at Benowm—all three hundred tents—could be gone in an hour, fata morgana.

Because he lives under the gun, Ali puts his stock in movable wealth, wealth on the hoof—camels, horses, goats, oxen, slaves. If you inventory his material possessions he's practically a beggar. The emir of Ludamar, ruler of thousands, hegemoner of an area the size of Wales, man of the Book and descendent of the Prophet, actually owns fewer things than a Chelsea chambermaid. A goat-hair tent, a change of *jubbah,* a pot, a cookstove, two muskets, a leaky hookah and a blunt-edge saber that once belonged to Major Houghton—that's about it. Ah, but his horses—moon-white, marbled with muscle, their tails red as an open vein (he dyes them). And his women! If Ali is to be envied, it's for his women. Any one of his four wives could launch a thousand ships—if they knew what ships were.

Chief among them—in influence and beauty both—is Fatima of Jafnoo, daughter of the sherif of the Al-Mu'ta tribe, Boo Khaloom. Fatima's erotic charms are predicated entirely on a single feature: her bulk. In a bone-thin society, what more appropriate ideal of human perfection? Fatima weights 462 pounds. To move from one corner of the tent to another requires the assistance of two slaves. On the sixty-mile trip to Deena, in the north, she once prostrated a pair of camels and a bullock, and finally had to be transported on a litter drawn by six oxen. Ali comes in off the desert, blood and sand in his eyes, and plunges into the moist fecundity of her flesh. She is a spring, a well, an oasis. She is milk over-

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spilling the bowl, a movable feast, green pasture and a side of beef. She is gold. She is rain.

Fatima was not always a beauty queen. As a girl she was a mere slip of a thing—big-boned and with enormous potential, yes—but nonetheless something of a slim and dark-eyed ugly duckling. Boo Khaloom took her in hand. He stepped into the tent one evening with a rush mat and a pillow. He spread the mat in a corner, set the pillow atop it, and commanded his daughter to sit. He then called for camel's milk and kouskous. Fatima was puzzled: the remains of the evening meal—wooden bowls black with flies, an overturned pitcher—still lay in the corner. All at once she became aware of shadows playing over the walls of the tent, as if a number of people were milling around outside. She asked her father if he was planning to meet with his counsellors. He told her to shut her hole. Suddenly the flap was thrown back and a man entered the tent. It was Mohammed Bello, sixty-three years old, her father's closest friend and advisor. He was naked. Fatima was mortified. She'd never seen a man's legs before, let alone those puckered wattles squirming against the old man's thigh like some freak of nature. She thought of the spineless struggling things caught in the muck of a dying waterhole. She was eleven years old. She burst into tears.

Mohammed Bello was not alone. The flap swished and eight other men, naked as babes, stepped silently into the tent. Zib Sahman, her godfather, was among them. And Akbar Al-Akbar, the oldest man of the tribe. When they were all assembled, a slave entered with a bowl the size of a birdbath. The bowl contained camel's milk, a week's supply at least. He was followed by a second slave carrying an even larger bowl filled to the rim with kouskous. The bowls were set before her. Camel's milk is sweet, and rich with nutrients. Kouskous, a sort of porridge made of boiled and pounded wheat, is the staple of the Moor's diet. It is not at all unpalatable, but all things have their limits.

"Eat," said Boo Khaloom.

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At first she didn't understand. Surely all this food must be for her father's guests. Did he expect her to serve them? But then she remembered that they were all naked and she began to blubber anew. Her father was shouting. "Eat, I said!" he roared. "Don't you understand Arabic? Have you lost your hearing? Eat!"

She glanced up at the eight venerables. They sat in a semicircle, watching her. They were still naked. And then came the biggest jolt of all: her father was stepping out of his *jabbah!* All her life—through meals, bedtime, on the road—she'd never glimpsed anything more than his face, hands and toes. Now suddenly here he was—naked—and equipped with the same rubbery wattles as the others. She was terrified. "Eat," he repeated. She was dazed. It was then that the switch appeared in his hand. He struck her twice across the face. She cried out. He struck her again. And then again. "Eat," he said.

She put her lips to the milk and drank between sobs. She took a fistful of kouskous and forced it into her mouth. But she wasn't hungry. She'd just eaten—and eaten more than usual. Her mother had been nagging her about her bones, her coarseness, how no husband would want her, a girl who looked like a desert ostrich. And so she had made an effort to eat more. Now she was full: another bite and she'd puke. The porridge caught in her throat.

Boo Khaloom was deranged. He whipped and shouted till his arm throbbed and his throat went raw. "No more cat's cradle with the other girls, no more lessons, no weaving—nothing. You will sit here, on this pillow, and eat until you come of age. You will eat and you will grow. You will be beautiful. Do you hear? Beautiful!" Mohammed Bello and the others watched. From time to time one of them would nod approvingly. Fatima ate. Wept and ate. "And when you come of age you will continue to eat—day and night. That is your duty. To your father, and to your husband. He will have a rod!" her father shouted. "A rod like this one. And he will thrash you as I am thrashing you now and as I will thrash you

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tomorrow and the next day and the day after that!'' Suddenly the venerables were on their feet, as if this were some sort of signal. Fatima looked up, her cheeks swollen with mush, and gasped: a hideous unnatural change had come over them. Where before they'd been flaccid, now they were hard. Wizened old turkey cocks, their members at half-mast, they closed in on her. ''Thrash you!'' her father shrieked and they began pumping at themselves, milking their rods with a whack and thwap, their faces strained and distant, beatific even. Fatima felt as if she were made of wax. Her head was light. She was falling, tumbling down through the eons, chasms in the earth, the abyss. It was then that she felt the first few random drops, like rain.

After that excoriating and traumatic night, she ate. She ate prodigiously, furiously, she couldn't get enough. Sugar-dates, mutton, yogurt, slabs of salt, kouskous and dried fish, kouskous and nuts, kouskous and kouskous. There was fruit in the south—tamarind, cassava, watermelon—flat loaves of bread, jars of wild honey, yams, rice, maize, butter and milk, milk, always milk. Goat's milk, cow's milk, camel's milk—she even suckled like an infant at the breast of a nursing slave. She was insatiable. She ate for fear, she ate for vengeance. She ate for beauty.

7. TANTALUS

He is perishing, winding down the long tunnel of waste and death, hurtling toward completion in the dust of generations gone down. He is perishing, quite simply, of thirst. Of hunger too—but the thirst is more immediate. At night, when they remember, the Moors give him a handful of kouskous and half a cup of yellow swill. Tonight they forget. His stomach contracts on air, cells wither and die like jellyfish washed up on the beach. Then the temperature drops and he lies huddled in his jacket, shivering and sweating, the fever an internal weather valve, on and off, sun and sleet. Outside, beyond the circle of tents, jackals shriek like a knife in the

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heart and hyenas gather to intimidate the moon. There will be weeping and sorrowing and the gnashing of teeth, he thinks. Then he closes his eyes.

Mungo's dream is immediate and vivid. He is out on the Great Desert in the heat of midday, the sun a torch, his mouth full of sand. There are men behind him, strangers—burned faces, beards, tattered clothes. They trail out over the horizon like ants. In his hand, a forked stick. At his side, Zander—*wally* old Zander—Ailie's brother. They used to fish together. "Where is she when we need her?" asks Mungo. "At home," says Zander. "Waiting." A man gags and pitches forward. Mungo turns him over and then starts back: the eye sockets are empty, the gums drawn back from the teeth, the skin crusty as a glazed ham. At that moment a pewter dipper appears overhead, its belly frosted with dew — and then another, and another—a procession of them, dippers full of water, floating overhead like gulls riding an updraft. A feeble huzza goes up from the men. They stretch out their arms and smack their gummy lips—but the dippers hang there, just out of reach. Frantic, they scramble over one another's shoulders, their fingers raking the sky. The dippers are coy, wriggling and sashaying, flirting with the outstretched fingers: but they won't give up a drop. The men despair, dashing their heads against stones and shrubs and rocky crags. "Do something!" they implore. "Help us!" Just then the forked stick begins to twitch. Mungo cocks his ear to the wind. He hears something: faint and distant, lilting and lyrical. A wet trickle of sound, like a flute or a harp. Can it be? He is quick, firm, decisive. "Follow me!" he shouts, and begins jogging toward the swelling sound of it, the roar, the hiss, the sweet syncopation of water rushing over a bed of stones. Dazed, the men stagger to their feet and hobble after him. Across a plain, up a rise and there, there it is! The Niger, clear and cold as an October morning, neat lawns clipped along its banks, punts, coots and great silent swans coasting over the dimpled surface, salmon leaping, cool ferns and leafy elms fanning the shore. He plunges in, the men

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whooping at his heels, ecstatic, redeemed, alive. But when he turns round, they've vanished. Waves lap, swans duck their heads: he's alone with his triumph. But no matter, he's having such a time, churning up waves, blowing bubbles and gulping, swallowing, sucking up the smooth, tooth-chilling current till he can drink no more.

He wakes with a stone in his throat. His tongue is dry. His palate is dry. His uvula. What he needs is a drink. Water. Ice. Blood. A cup of tea. Glass of milk. Mug of beer. He tiptoes to the entranceway and peers out. The three guards are asleep, chewing at their beards and snoring like drunken lords. But here's the rub: they're stretched out across the entrance, shoulder to shoulder, the near man flush with the flap of the tent. He'd have to broadjump the three of them to get clear —and even assuming he could make it, there's still the thump of his descent to contend with. Why they'd be up like starved wolves at even the hint of a sound, cursing and clutching at their daggers. He hesitates. But then, miracle of miracles, the man in the center rolls over, exposing a few inches of open ground. It's now or never. The explorer eases out of his boots, takes a deep breath, and steps over the first man. The air is still. Somewhere a bird cries out. But the guard sleeps on, stertorous, lips smacking and lids twitching. Mungo shifts his weight to the front foot and begins to swing the left leg over when suddenly he feels a bit woozy, his mind for some reason flashing on the high-wire artist at Bartholomew Fair. It was years ago. The young explorer stood in the crowd, kewpie doll under his arm, and watched the man negotiate a wire strung 200 feet from the ground. The man was in the process of balancing a barge pole in one hand and juggling half a dozen apples in the other, when a pigeon landed at the tip of the pole. The man fell.

Mungo blinks his eyes and finds himself seated on the chest of the first guard. The guard mutters something in Arabic, slow as syrup, and then begins rubbing the explorer's hand against his bristling cheek. The sensation, considering the circumstances, is not at all unpleasant. But after a

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moment the guard resumes his snoring and Mungo is able to extricate himself and slip off into the night.

For more than a month now the explorer has been a captive of the Moors. He is held in solitary confinement. His horse and goods have been appropriated. He has not been charged with any crime. The question of snubbing out his eyes has, praise to Allah, been shelved for the time being. It seems that Fatima, Ali's principal wife, has sent word from Deena that she insists on examining the freak intact—evil-eye and all. (In London they flock to see the human caterpillar and the man with three noses; in Ludamar it's albino mutants.) Still, the explorer's life has been anything but idyllic. He's been held against his will, harassed as an infidel, threatened with death and mutilation, starved, bullied, tormented, bored, deprived of conversation, intellectual stimulus and water. And he hasn't laid eyes on his interpreter for a week. When he last saw him, Johnson was still keeping a tongue—civil or otherwise — in his head. Ali had found that flap of muscle and fatty tissue a sine qua non when interrogating the explorer about the arcana of his dress and baggage: the shoes and stockings, the buttons of his coat and trousers, his compass, watch and razor. "How does this work? And this?" Ali inquired, directing his questions to Johnson while his sullen dark eyes fixed on the explorer's face. Eventually, he made the explorer step in and out of his clothes thirty-seven times so that successive groups of rubbernecks could marvel at the ingenuity of it. After the thirty-seventh demonstration, Ali expressed a curiosity as to why Mungo had come to the Sahel in the first place: if he wasn't a trader he must be a spy. "I'm looking for the River Niger," Mungo told him. Ali studied his great toe for a moment and then looked up. "There are no rivers in your country?"

Down a gentle rise from the encampment—no more than three hundred yards—are the wells. Mungo can hear the lowing of the cattle as they crowd round the troughs for their

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nightly irrigation. When he gets closer he can make out the rounded humps and the wild spiked horns jabbing at the sky like a forest in motion. The cows—more like overweight gazelles than beef on the hoof—stamp and push and bellow for water. He could bellow along with them. He could cry and screech and out-howl all the demons in hell he's so thirsty. But what's this? Something moving in the stand of acacias up ahead. The explorer sidles up for a closer look.

Six or seven slaves, muffled in their burnooses, are lounging round an open fire, passing a pipe and laughing. Every once in a while one of them dips a bucket in the well and sloshes its contents into a trough, where the cattle snort and shove to get at it. Mungo steps out of the shadows and goes down on his knees to them. "Water," he begs. "Give me water." And then in English: "A drop, a taste, a spoonful!"

At first they're startled. But then, looking down at the wasted wretch prostrating himself in the cowshit, they begin to laugh. Their eyes are glossy and veined with red. They stagger, whoop, hold their sides, their laughter echoing into the night—"Yee-ha-ha-ha-haa!"—laughter like the throttling of birds. Then one of them steps forward, pipe in hand. His eyes are tiny, pig's eyes, and his brow swells out over his face like an eroded riverbank. "Water!" cries Mungo. The man bends, drawing on the pipe, and blows a lungful of smoke in the explorer's face. The odor is strong, aromatic, viscous: are they smoking incense? Mungo coughs. Then the man rocks back on his heels and calls out to his companions: "*Nazarini* wants water?" They laugh. "Give him water, Sidi!" Sidi turns back to the explorer and hisses: *"La illah el allah, Mahomet rasowl Allahi."* Mungo recognizes the phrase: There is only one God, and Mohammed is his prophet. They make him repeat it a hundred times a day. "Okay," he says. "Okay," and mutters a quick Lord's Prayer, begging extenuating circumstances. Sidi kicks him. *"La illah el allah, Mahomet rasowl Allahi,"* says Mungo. "Water!" shout the others. "Give the *Nazarini* water, Sidi.

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Give him holy water!''

The hocks of the cattle rise and fall. Dust settles on the explorer like a parched snow. It is up his nose, down his throat. He can hear them, the stupid beasts, drooling over the troughs in mindless contentment, the precious silken droplets tumbling from their muzzles, catching like jewels at the tips of their whiskers. ''You want water?'' Sidi says. Mungo nods. And then suddenly, without warning, the slave throws back his *jubbah* and pisses on him—quick and salt, the hot urine runs down his collar, through his fingers, soaks deep into the fabric of his waistcoat. The explorer leaps up in a frenzy, desperate and homicidal, but Sidi has backed off, laughing, and now the others are reaching for stones and bits of wood. Mungo stands there, weak and stinking, as the herdsmen begin to pelt him. ''Drink piss, Christian!'' they jeer. He turns heel and jogs off into the night.

It is quiet. The stars fan out across the heavens like spilled milk; mosquitoes whine in the trees. He is turned away from the next three wells in succession, pummelled with fists and sticks. At the last well, an ancient brackish pit set apart from the others, an old slave and his son, a boy of eight or nine, are watering their master's herd by torchlight. Mungo begs them for a drink. The old man eyes him suspiciously for a moment, then dips a bucket of water from the well. *''Salaam, salaam, salaam,''* says Mungo, reaching out for it, when the boy pulls his father's sleeve. *''Nazarini,''* says the boy. The old man hesitates, looking first at the bucket, then at the well. He is concerned about contamination, hexes, a well gone dry in the night. ''Please,'' says Mungo, ''I beg you.'' The old man shuffles to the trough, empties the bucket and points a weathered finger. The explorer doesn't have to be asked twice. He throws himself forward, wedging his head between the big horned skulls of a pair of heifers.

The trough looks like a gutter on a rainy day, the water like sewage, twigs and straw and bits of offal swirling on the surface. The explorer buries his face and drinks, but the competition is fierce, the stream already a puddle, cattle

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drooling, their great pink tongues lapping up the last drops like sponges. Mungo turns to the old man. "More!" he shouts. "More!" A white cow, its eyes big as a man's forehead, knocks him over. And then suddenly a gunshot barks out, loud as a thunderclap. Then another. The cattle fall back, confused, butting shoulders, snouts and flanks, panicky, running blind. *Ka-bomb, Ka-bomb, Ka-bomb,* they boom off into the night.

When the dust settles, Mungo finds himself looking up at three horsemen. One of them is Dassoud, the hyphenated scar glistening in the torchlight. There is a pistol in his hand. He steadies his mount, levels the pistol at the explorer's head and pulls the trigger. Nothing happens. Mungo sits there in the dust and cattle droppings, his heart frozen, nerves shot, wondering how on earth to conciliate this madman with the gun. *"La illah el allah, Mahomet rasowl Allahi,"* he says. Dassoud growls, pouring a fresh charge into the priming pan. The horses stamp and whinny; the old man and his son cower. Then Dassoud raises the gun again, shouts something in Arabic, squeezes the trigger. A flash of light, a sound like hot coals dropped in a tub of water. The pistol has misfired. "What have I done?" the explorer pleads, edging away. Dassoud curses, flings down the pistol and calls over his shoulder for another. "Hua!" shouts the man at his back, tossing him a fresh weapon. Dassoud snatches it out of the air, cocks the hammer, and aims at a constellation of freckles just to the left of the explorer's nose.

"Mr. Park!" Johnson, skirts aflap, bursts into the circle of light like a character out of the commedia dell'arte. His chest is heaving and his jowls are streaked with sweat. "Mr. Park, you crazy? Get up on your feet and double-time it back to that tent before they shoot you dead on the spot. You got the whole place in a uproar. They think you escaping."

Mungo looks up. Fires blaze on the hillside. Horsemen ride off into the night with torches. There are shouts and curses, random gunshots. Mungo rises. Dassoud lowers the pistol.

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8. LAYING IT ON THE LINE

Dawn. The sun breaks over the Sahel like a cracked egg and takes up where it left off the day before—scalding, incinerating, searing the life from everything within its compass. Carrion-sniffers and night-roving reptiles creep back to their dens, and the big battered Libyan vultures sail out over the plain to check out the leavings. Rocks begin to expand, stunted shrubs dig deeper into the earth, mimosas fold up their leaves like parasols. By eight in the morning the horizon is shirred.

Mungo Park lies motionless on his back, watching a millipede trace a series of blind circles across the roof of his tent. Since the night of his "attempted escape" things have gone hard on him. Six men now doze outside his tent each night, and his food and water ration has been cut by half. It begins to occur to him that he may not make it after all, that he might just lie here and waste away, dauntless discoverer of the interior walls of a Moorish tent. He will join Ledyard, Lucas and Houghton in the ranks of failure and ignominy. He will never again lay eyes on Ailie, nor his mother, nor the bonny banks of the Tweed. His bones will dry and crack and fall to dust under the alien sun and the wheeling strange colossi of misplaced constellations. He begins to feel daunted.

Suddenly the flaps part and Johnson ducks into the tent. In his hand, a *guerba* (also known as a waterbag). The explorer lies there, racked with fever, riddled with worms, his stomach shrunken, sphincter open wide, barely able to raise his eyes. He is weak and stinking, tabescent, at the far edge of hope. Johnson kneels beside him and feeds the leather nipple into his mouth. His lips grope, pulse quickens. It is water, cold and clear, water dipped from the shifting porous depths of the earth. It stirs the roots of his hair, firms his toenails, sings to his brittle bones. "I'm saved!" he gasps, and then vomits.

"It's all right, Mr. Park, Take it easy: you got the whole

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thing to yourself.''

''Wha?'' The explorer's eyes are crusted and yellow, cheeks drawn, his beard a playground for ticks, fleas, lice and maggots.

''You heard me right. Chief jackal, he tells me to come in here and give you the bota bag and then a pan of milk and kouskous.''

''Milk? Kouskous?'' Johnson might just as well have announced haggis, finnan haddie and sheep's head soup. Mungo goes into peristaltic shock, then jerks himself up, clutching at the *guerba* and ransacking the tent with eyes. ''Where?'' he pants, struggling to his feet. ''Where? Tell me for God's sake!''

At that moment a boy enters with a wooden bowl. Milk and kouskous. The boy makes as if to lay it at the explorer's feet, but Mungo snatches it from him and buries his face in the thick ropy paste with all the desperation of a man stranded on the desert for forty days and forty nights. Which is precisely what he is.

Afterward, he pats his abdomen. ''Johnson,'' he says. ''Oh-ho Johnson, Johnson, Johnson, how I needed that.'' . . .But wait! What has he done!? The bowl's been scraped clean and here's his faithful interpreter languishing before his eyes! ''Johnson,'' he mutters, staring down at the ground, ''. . .can you ever, can you ever forgive me? I'm afraid I went into a bit of a feeding frenzy there. . .I forgot all about you.''

Johnson holds up his palm. ''Oh they been feeding me right along, don't you worry about that. Got to. Else how am I going to bust my ass for them? Fetch this, mend that. Scrub this pot, milk them goats, oil up Akbar's sandals and skim some cream for the horses. Shit. It's like being back on the plantation again. Sometimes I wish they'd just let me lie here and starve along with you.''

Mungo strokes the soggy grain from his beard and systematically licks the kernels from his fingers, then takes a long pull at the waterbag. Color trickles back into his cheeks. ''So

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what's up?'' he says. ''What's made the bloody camel-drivers so charitable all of a sudden?''

''Fatima.''

Fatima. The syllables flow like wind on water. First she'd saved his eyes, and now the rest of him. Hope glimmers. ''She wants to see me?''

Johnson nods. ''Ali says you got to be fed, washed up and made presentable. He won't have his wife examining a unwashed Christian. And he gave me this, too,'' handing the explorer a pale folded garment.

''What is it?''

''*Jubbah*. Ali says you got to cover up your legs—he finds your trousers objectionable, high-quality nankeen or no.'' Johnson laughs. ''You ever get back to London you can sweep all the beaux and noodles under the table, start a craze: skirts for gentlemen!''

Mungo laughs along with him, drunk on food and water. The two chuckle and wheeze, wiping tears from their eyes. Then Johnson looks up, suddenly serious. ''She'll be here tomorrow night,'' he says. ''Don't blow it.''

9. PLANTATION SONG

On this sub-Saharan evening awash with pale light and tapering shadow, Mungo Park, for the first time in nearly three months, finds himself out of the tent and back in the saddle again. His horse has been restored to him (cachexic as ever, looking like one of the gutted nags the Druids used to impale for decoration), his beard, locks and loins cleansed and anointed, his rags exchanged for a spanking white *jubbah*. On his head, a battered tophat; round his shoulders, the blue-velvet jacket he wore while addressing the African Association at St. Alban's Tavern, Pall Mall. Ali and Dassoud flank him on their chargers. Ali's mount is white, Dassoud's so absolutely black it cuts a hole in the horizon (an illusion he enhances by blackening the animal's hoofs and anus, and staining its teeth). Johnson brings up the rear on an

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Abyssinian ass.

They are bound for Fatima's tent at the far edge of the encampment, a distance of perhaps six or seven hundred yards. Ali and Dassoud are silent, while Mungo, *sotto voce,* rehearses phrases from his Arabic grammar ("I am honored to bask in your presence"; "Allow me to make obeisance to the undersides of your feet"; "Hot, isn't it?"). As they pass through the heart of the camp dogs dart out to yap at the Christian's stirrups, children gather to bombard him with nuggets of camel dung, adults step from their tents to squint up at him and denigrate his race, creed and color. "I piss in your mother's hole!" a man yells. But then Ali holds up his hand and the voices fall silent, the children run to their mothers, the dogs vanish. "Thanks," says Mungo. Ali's face is impassive. His gesture has had nothing whatever to do with compassion or fellow-feeling—he just doesn't want his wife inspecting a washed Christian in a shit-stained *jubbah,* that's all.

Fatima's tent is two or three times the size of any of the others in camp, and distinguished by broad bands of color: gray, beige, indigo. Mungo recognizes the huge Nubian out front. The Nubian stands there, on guard, flexing the black bulges between his elbow and shoulder. Off to the right a woman squats in the dust, busily milking four or five she-goats. The explorer observes the pale soles of her feet, the yellow torpedoes of the goats' teats. A fly lands on the explorer's nose. The sun touches the horizon.

"Dismount!" shouts Ali, as he and Dassoud spring from their steeds like a pair of Russian tumblers. Johnson, ambling up on his ass, relays the command to his employer, while the Nubian steps forward to take charge of the animals.

It should be said that the explorer's mind is laboring under a Sisyphean strain at this juncture: he is keyed up, jittery, aquiver with apprehension and doubt. The success of his mission—yea, his life itself—may depend on the impression he makes in his forthcoming interview with the Queen. His

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stomach sinks with the same nauseous, socked-in-the-kidney feeling that used to assail him at school before end-of-term exams. Butterflies, they used to call it. Stage fright. Heebie-jeebies. The Choke.

And so, sweating like a marathon runner, he steps down out of the saddle, catches his left foot in the stirrup and slaps to the ground in a storm of dust and goat-hair. He lies there a moment, thinking Christ in Heaven what have I done now?, while Dassoud and Ali exchange glances and Johnson rushes to his aid. After steadying the horse, loosening the stirrup and finally thinking to remove the explorer's boot, Johnson succeeds in extricating him. But this is just the beginning. The ground here, it seems, is a Mecca for the costive denizens of the Sahel, an unspoiled latrine for Mother Nature and all her feathered, furred and squamate creation. Goat turds lie here, cheek-by-jowl with hyena ordure; grainy bars of camel dung, dogshit, cowshit and sheepshit coil round the withered ropy leavings of adders and skinks; there's even a stray ibex turd or two. Mungo rises from this morass, brushing at his *jubbah* and dusting his hat. "Sorry about that," he says. Ali shrugs. Then gestures for him to follow, and disappears through the soft contiguous flaps of Fatima's tent and into the mystery beyond. Mungo, reeking like a zoo, his back an abstract collage of mauves, siennas and dun yellows, the representative of King George III and all of England, follows the emir of Ludamar into the sanctum of the Queen.

It is dark inside, a pair of oil lamps burning fitfully. There are tapestries, mats, urns, a perch on which two birds of prey —gerfalcons—are calmly disemboweling a jerboa. The explorer glances up just as one of them finds a long strand of intestine and begins to tug at it, like a robin with a worm. "*Salaam aleichem,*" says Ali, and there she is, seated on a pillow the size of a double bed. The explorer is stunned. He'd expected a big woman—but this. . .this is impossible! She is gargantuan, elephantine, her great bundled turban and flowing *jubbah* like a pair of circus tents, her shadow

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leaping and swelling in the uncertain light until it engulfs the room. Her attendants—two girls in billowy pantaloons and a hoary old woman—sit at her feet like olives flanking a canteloupe in a surreal still life.

Mungo cannot make out her face, which is concealed behind a *yashmak*—the double horsehair veil worn by Muslim women in public—but he is immediately struck by her feet and hands. Petite and delicate, they float at the tips of her bloated extremities like ducks on a pond. He is fascinated. Each of her digits is ornamented with a ring, and for some reason—perhaps to draw attention to their charms—her hands and feet have been stained saffron. The effect is dazzling. When finally she turns her head toward him she gasps, and gives out a faint squeal. Ali rushes to her, jabbering in Arabic. When she answers him, her voice is soft and sensual as a sunshower.

Mungo nudges his interpreter.

"She says she's afraid," Johnson whispers.

"Afraid? I'm the one whose prunes are on the line here."

"You're a Christian. To her that's like being a cannibal or a werewolf or something."

"What about you?"

"Don't look at me, brother—I'm a Animist. Shhh . . . now she's bitching about the smell . . . do they all smell like that?"

Suddenly Ali barks out a command. "He wants us on our knees," says Johnson, easing himself down and burying his forehead in the sand. Mungo follows suit. They pose like this for a long while ("I'm beginning to feel like an ostrich," Johnson quips), until a high nasal voice begins yodeling out the evening prayers. It is the marabout, stationed somewhere outside the tent. Ali and Dassoud likewise prostrate themselves, and Fatima comes down off her throne like a thundercloud rolling down the side of a mountain. As she tilts her forehead to the earth, the explorer can feel her rich black eyes upon him.

When the prayers are finished, Fatima lumbers back to her pillow, settles herself primly, and softly dismisses Dassoud

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and her husband. She then turns to Mungo and his interpreter, and asks them to be seated. Behind them, the Nubian edges into the tent, scimitar in hand. For a long while the room is silent, Fatima and her attendants ocularly feasting on this blond apparition in the blue-velvet jacket. Finally the Queen addresses him, a single sentence, her voice rising as if on the crest of a question.

Mungo looks at Johnson.

"She wants you to stand up and take your jacket off."

Mungo complies, and one of the girls slips up to take it from him and deliver it to the Queen. Fatima regards the garment silently, running her hand over the material against the nap, taking one of the brass buttons between her teeth. The explorer stands there in his *jubbah* like a child in a nightgown. "Give it to her," Johnson whispers.

The explorer clears his throat, and in his best Arabic offers her the jacket. She looks up at him and politely declines, but does appropriate two of the brass buttons. "For earrings," she explains, holding them up to the corners of her *yashmak*. From the shadows one of the gerfalcons begins to crow: ca-ha! ca-ha! Fatima wets her lips. Does he want any pork? she asks.

"Tell her no," says Johnson.

At that moment One-Eye appears with a bush pig on a leash. The pig has an elongated snout randomly disfigured with lumps and ridges, several yellowed tusks, and a nasty look in its eye. With a leer, One-Eye offers Mungo the pig. "Snark-snark," says the pig.

"Look disgusted," Johnson coaches.

The explorer does his best to express horror and loathing, knowing full well how deeply the Moors abhor pork. He backs away, fingers atremble, slaps his forehead and tugs at his lip while the pig, squealing like an accordion, stamps and stutters and jerks at its leash. The performance seems to be reassuring Fatima, and so the explorer gyrates even more wildly —really hamming it up—until he accidentally stumbles into the gerfalcons' perch. This, he immediately realizes, is a mistake. At the touch of his elbow the birds rear up and shriek in

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his face, their beaks and talons like scissors, wings beating round his ears. Then the larger of the two springs onto his shoulder. He is terrified. In his anxiety to brush it away he ducks directly into the path of the pig, who has been waiting for just such a chance. In a flash the pig lurches forward and savagely bites the explorer six or seven times in rapid succession. During the panic that ensues, the explorer somehow manages to collapse half the tent and wind up spread-eagled across the Queen's voluminous lap. The Nubian then intercedes to behead the pig with one swipe of his scimitar, while One-Eye and the pantaloon girls try to dislodge the shit-caked and bleeding explorer from the Queen's person. Through it all, Mungo can hear the strains of Johnson's voice raised in song—it seems almost as if he's singing a dirge, down-hearted and mournful, one of the old plantation songs Johnson likes to call "the Blues."

"You done blown it now," he's singing. "Blown it now. Lord God Almighty, you done blown it now."

10. NEW CONTINENTS, ANCIENT RIVERS

But he hadn't blown it. Not by a long shot. In fact, as things turned out, the Queen didn't seem at all indisposed by the presence of a porcipophagic albino infidel in her lap—perhaps, in a strange way, she even welcomed it. The explorer's first intimation of this came almost immediately. As he lay there, stunned and bleeding, cradled in the trembling aqueous flux of her lap like a ship come to harbor, he felt he detected a movement deep within her. A ripple, a swell. An undulation as soft and inevitable as the rings which fan out over the waters of a pond after a stone has disturbed its surface. Was she laughing? Tittering deep in the omphalos of that magnificent flesh factory? Was he a hit, after all? Unfortunately he had no chance to find out, for Dassoud, murder in his eye, was already hacking at the deflated wall of the tent. Mungo sprang from the Queen's nave and planted his brow in the earth, following Johnson's example. *"La illah el*

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allah," he chanted by way of amends, "*Mahomet rasowl Allahi.*" "Forgive us our trespasses," Johnson wailed, "do unto to others, blessed are the meek, and bathe ye all in the milk of lambs and virgins."

There was the shriek of rending goat hair—*zit! zat! zoot!*—and Dassoud leapt into the tent, inflamed by the notion that the Queen was in danger, thirsting to exact a hasty and savage retribution. "AAAArrrrr!" he howled, whirling his terrible swift sword—but then he stopped in his tracks. What was going on here? The handmaidens were in hysterics, tent poles shattered, blood spewed and feathers strewn from one end of the place to the other. . . and yet there sat Fatima, just as he'd left her, while the Nazarini and his slave were quailing on the ground, One-Eye and the Nubian standing over them like executioners. "What's going on here?" he demanded.

The Nubian, who had never said a word in his life, said nothing.

The pig lay in the corner, still quivering, gouts of blood issuing from its throat. Headless.

"Lord have mercy!" said Johnson, addressing the sand.

Finally the handmaidens' lamentations wound down to an easy gagging mewl, and One-Eye launched a rapid-fire narration of what had transpired, playing down his own involvement as best he could and emphasizing the reckless and irresponsible behavior of the *Nazarini* and his slave. Dassoud listened impatiently, rocking on his feet, twisting the saber in his hand, until finally he cut the story short and insisted that the transgressors be led out into the dunes and disemboweled. At this point Fatima cleared her throat. Dassoud fell silent. Her tone was firm, her diction spare. The sense of it blew right by the explorer, but the upshot of the whole thing was that he and Johnson were led back to his tent, where a seventh comatose guard was added to the six men tried and true who were already dozing before the entranceway.

An hour later an unwonted aroma charged the air. It was

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lingering and savory, redolent of hearths and basting and relishes. It was the smell of meat. The explorer swallowed twice. "Johnson—do you smell what I smell?"

"Prime rib. I'd know it anywhere."

Just then the flaps parted and the savory rich aura filled the tent. It was one of the pantaloon girls. In her hand, the haunch of an addax, still hissing from the spit. She gave it to the explorer. "For you," she said. "From Fatima." Then she winked and disappeared into the night.

Mungo tore a mouthful from the bone, then passed the joint to his interpreter. He was laughing. "We're home free now, old fellow—guess I must have done something right after all."

"Maybe she's big on slapstick," Johnson said.

"Who knows? But one thing's for sure: she's an angel. First the *guerba,* then the milk and kouskous—and now this!"

"Yeah," said Johnson, chewing. "It was big of her."

The next morning she sent him a dish of yogurt and bitter-sweet hoona berries; in the evening it was scrambled brains and rice. He was astonished. After two months of water and mush, here was something he could sink his teeth into. And this was only the beginning. In the ensuing days Fatima's girls brought him sheep's liver, camel's hump (braised), a stew of chick peas and sweetbreads, buttermilk pudding, three dozen bustard giblets and a whole roast kid. "Soul food," Johnson called it. "It's your inner man that's got her worked up—never mind your disreputable and shit-crusted outer man." Inner man, outer man—what difference did it make? Red meat fed them both. Why, he must have dropped a good four stone since he left Portsmouth. He glanced down at his yellowed toes and drawn ankles, the sticks of his forearms: couldn't weigh much more than ten right now. But then he grinned, and muttered a little prayer. If this kept up he'd put it back on in no time. And then—who knows?—maybe he'd be strong enough to make a run for it.

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There were other changes too. He was allowed to wander round the camp at will (shadowed by his seven keepers, of course), spend as much time as he liked with Johnson, and even have a first-hand look at some of the Moors' customs and ceremonies. This last, above all else, lifted his spirits. After all, he *was* an explorer—and here he was, exploring. He witnessed two circumcisions, a funeral, the death of a dog which had lifted its leg against Ali's tent. He watched the slaves pounding millet, tanning hides, churning butter in a *guerba* suspended between two sticks; he watched them reciting prayers, defecating, throwing pots, chewing roots, tattooing infants and dogs. It was all very illuminating. But ephemeral. He couldn't keep track of things from one day to the next.

Then one morning, as he sat watching a slave tie up the nipples of a camel to keep its calf from suckling in the heat of day, an idea hit him like a blow to the back of the head: he'd write a book! He'd write a book and be famous like Marco Polo or Gulliver or Richard Jobson. Why not? Here he was, suffering for the great cause of humanity and the extension of the horizons of knowledge, alone and friendless amongst people who were little more than a rumor to the average Englishman. It would be criminal to miss his chance to document it. He marched back to the tent, tore the leaves from his pocket Bible, and began writing, filling sheet after sheet with his impressions of the climate, the flora, the fauna, the geological formations, the habits and physiognamies of the Blackamoors, Mandingoes, Serawoolies and Foulahs. He described Ali's beard, Dassoud's scowl, the heat of midday, the solitude of the baobab. Talked of Fatima's graciousness, the tang of the hoona berry, woodsmoke on the night air. He filled thirty sheets that first day, and secreted them in the crown of his hat. Like a thief.

One evening he witnessed a wedding. It was strikingly similar to the funeral he'd attended: keening hags, howling dogs, a solemn procession. The bride was a walking shroud, veiled from head to foot, even her eyes invisible. He

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wondered how she was able to see where she was going. The keening women followed the bride, their stride measured by the beat of the tabala one of them carried. Doom-doom-doom, echoed the drum. The groom wore slippers with curled toes. He was accompanied by a retinue of Mussulmen in embroidered burnooses and a cordon of slaves leading goats and bullocks, and carrying a tent. At an appointed spot the tent was struck, the goats and bullocks slaughtered, a fire ignited in a depression in the earth. There was a feast. Beef and mutton, songbirds, roasted larvae and other delicacies. There was dancing; songs were sung and tales were told. And then there was the piéce de rèsistance: a whole baked camel.

BAKED CAMEL (STUFFED) **serves 400**

2,000 dates
1,000 plover eggs
100 two-pound carp
15 bustards, cleaned and plucked
2 sheep
1 large camel
Seasonings

Dig trench. Reduce inferno to hot coals, three feet in depth. Separately hard-cooked eggs. Scale carp and stuff with shelled eggs and dates. Season bustards and stuff with stuffed carp. Stuff stuffed bustards into sheep and stuffed sheep into camel. Singe camel. Then wrap in leaves of doum palm and bury in pit. Bake two days. Serve with rice.

A regular feature of this expansive period were the explorer's daily meetings with the Queen. Each afternoon—immediately following the *dhuhur* or midday prayers—he was summoned to Fatima's tent for a question/answer period. She questioned, he answered. Insatiable, she never tired of quizzing him. She was an anthropologist, a sociologist, a comparative anatomist. She wanted to dissect and absorb his habits, thoughts and beliefs; she wanted to taste his food, wear his clothes, sit at his box in the theater. England, Europe, the vast and uncertain oceans—she wanted them built of words, words that would calcify in her imagination. She wanted visions. She wanted the memories behind

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his eyes. She wanted to digest him. Why had he come to Ludamar? How did his father manage the herds without him? Why did he wear so asinine *(jalla nâ)* a covering on his head? Did all Christians have cats' eyes? What was the sea like? Had he ever been crucified? The explorer, grinning like a monkey and trying his clumsy best to radiate wit and charm, answered her questions as patiently and fully as he was able.

One afternoon she asked if the *Nazarini* practiced circumcision. "Certainly," Mungo replied. She wanted to see for herself. The explorer looked at Johnson. "What do I do now?" he whispered. "Tell her you'll be more than happy to demonstrate—but it'll have to be in private. Then toss your eyebrows a couple of times." Mungo told her. He tossed his eyebrows. For a moment the tent was as silent as the dark side of the moon. The Queen's black eyes burned over the fringe of her *yashmak*. Then she slapped her thigh and tittered.

That night the explorer ate leg of lamb.

On this particular morning, three and a half weeks since his first meeting with Fatima, the explorer is sitting in the shade of an acacia, writing. *The Moorish women,* he writes,*wear their hair in nine plaits, which they divide as follows: two on either side of the face, six thinner braids over the crown, and one stout coil at the base of the neck. The hair is washed and oiled once a month, dressed and re-plaited weekly. For sanitary reasons, and because it tends to bleach the hair somewhat, the women prefer a rinse of camel's urine, which is collected for this purpose. (One can always see a slave or two, cup in hand, pursuing a micturating camel about the camp.) The urine is a powerful astringent, and serves to destroy vermin and other parasites. Indeed, I have had an opportunity to assess its efficacy personally, as my pubes, axillae, side-whiskers and locks were infested with lice and desert mites. I found it refreshing, if somewhat mephitic. . .*

There is a bloom in the explorer's cheek. A clarity in his

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eye. Worms, grippe, scabies, the fever and racheting cough — they're things of the past. Nasty memories. He's a meat-eater now, a man of broth and blood, as befits a Scotsman, and gaining strength day by day. The heat enervates him, of course, and he still suffers attacks of confusion—but all in all the change in diet and the fresh air have gone a long way toward resurrecting him. And the peace and quiet have had something to do with it too. Just a month ago it would have been impossible for him to sit here: the very sight of him drove the average Mussulman into a frenzy. Within seconds he would have been beleaguered by a stinking, spittle-spewing mob of Muslim zealots. Now it's different. They know he's under Fatima's protection, and aside from isolted incidents (someone walloped him in the side of the head with a pig's pizzle no more than twenty minutes ago), he is left to himself.

The Moorish men, on the other hand, never bathe. They do, however have a biannual ceremony known as asíla má, *during which they bury themselves in hot sand for some forty-five minutes to an hour just prior to sunset. They are then disinterred, rubbed down with the sweat of an estruating mare and thrashed with the underbranches of the* serîf *bush. I am told that the operation is congenial to long life and sexual vigor.*

As the explorer looks up to wet his quill, he is startled to discover that he is not alone. Standing there before him, her chocolate eyes following the dip and rush of the pen, is the plumper of the pantaloon girls. "What is it?" he says.

"Fatima says you must come to her."

Come to her? At 10 A.M.? What could she possibly want with him at this hour? "All right," he says, getting to his feet. "I'll fetch Johnson."

"No," says the girl. "Fatima says he will not be needed."

The explorer shrugs. "Lead the way," he says.

As he pushes through the flaps and into the tent he is instantly engulfed in darkness. Blue spheres pulsate before

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his eyes; yellow cartwheels drift off into space. He can see nothing. There are the familiar odors of frankincense and camel urine, and from the corner, the rasp of the gerfalcons chewing at their wings. But why hasn't she lighted a lamp? And where's that damned girl gone off to? Ah, well. No matter. May as well ride with the current. "*Salaam aleichem,*" he says, addressing the shadows.

"*Aleichem as salaam,*" comes the reply, soft as the beat of a moth's wing.

He jumps. She's sitting right beside him—he could have stumbled over her. . . . Christ it's dark. Can't very well move for fear of upsetting something. "Braaak!" says one of the gerfalcons. Maybe he should ask her to light a taper—but then how in the name of Christ do you say "taper"? He settles for "*Kaif halkum?*"—how are you?

"*Bishhára,*" she answers, which he takes to mean she has no complaints.

Silence.

He shuffles his feet, picks his ear and jerks at his knuckles, wondering if he should risk sitting. It's an awkward moment. After ten or twenty seconds of ear-picking, he makes a stab at conversation, hoping to say how pleasant it is to see her again—though he can barely make her out. Unfortunately, what he actually says is: "My sight is rabid pleasure."

Fatima titters.

Encouraged, he goes on, addressing the shadowy bulk before him. Battling case endings, syntax, verb tenses and a spotty vocabulary, the explorer waxes eloquent as Antony, Demosthenes and the Speaker of the House all rolled into one, telling her how much he's appreciated the attention she's given him, not to mention the jellied calves' feet and puréed mung beans. At that moment, however, the elderly attendant enters with a taper and the explorer discovers that he's been addressing a hand loom. The Queen is actually seated on the far side of the tent, rising up out of her enormous pillow like an Alp rising from the foothills. The explorer is bewildered. "Come over here," she says.

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At the sound of Fatima's voice the old woman starts, then hurries about her business. She fixes the candle in the upturned palm of an ivory figurine, gathers her skirts and sweeps past the explorer with a lickerish grin. Mungo starts forward, but then hesitates. Something is wrong here—but what? Suddenly it hits him: Fatima's head is bare, the thick braids fanning out over her shoulders like the runners of a plant. He's never glimpsed so much as a single hair before — unless you count her eyebrows. "Come here," she repeats.

The explorer steps up to her and bows, trying to think of something witty to say. She pats the pillow. "Up here," she motions. Mungo shrugs. Then scales the pillow and sinks into its vastness. The old woman is nowhere to be seen. Nor is there any trace of the pantaloon girls. It occurs to him that he has never before been alone with the Queen. But now the pillow has begun to quake, flowing along its length like a wind-driven sea. He looks up. The Queen is pulling the *jubbah* up over her head, grunting daintily as she labors with the flashing fields of cloth. Beneath the *jubbah:* naked flesh. The explorer begins to get the idea.

"Help me," she moans, the gown smothering her head and upper torso. Mungo leans forward and seizes the nape of the stupendous garment, thinking of sheets and flags and circus tents. He tugs, she grunts. Her arms ripple beneath the cloth like bone under skin, she gasps, and then suddenly her breasts jog free, shuddering mightily with the concussion, colossal orbs, heavenly bodies. They come to rest over the multiple folds of her abdomen like the twin moons of Mars. The explorer is suddenly stung with hurry and necessity. He jerks at the recalcitrant cloth with all the meat-eating fervor he can rouse, panting and moaning, until all at once the *jubbah* gives as if it were made of paper. He falls back, and there she is—the Queen—naked and ineluctable as the great wide fathomless sea. *"Yudhkul,"* she whispers. *"Yudhkul alaiha."*

He flings the boots, paws at the buttons, jerks at his *jubbah.* Moist and mountainous, she waits for him, eyes

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aglow, her flesh smoldering like Vesuvius. He wheezes with hurry and anticipation. It's a dream, an attack of fever: no mere mortal could approach this! He scrambles atop her, feeling for toeholds—so much terrain to explore—mountains, valleys and rifts, new continents, ancient rivers.

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Portfolio

Blasted Allegories: Photographic Quote

John Baldessari

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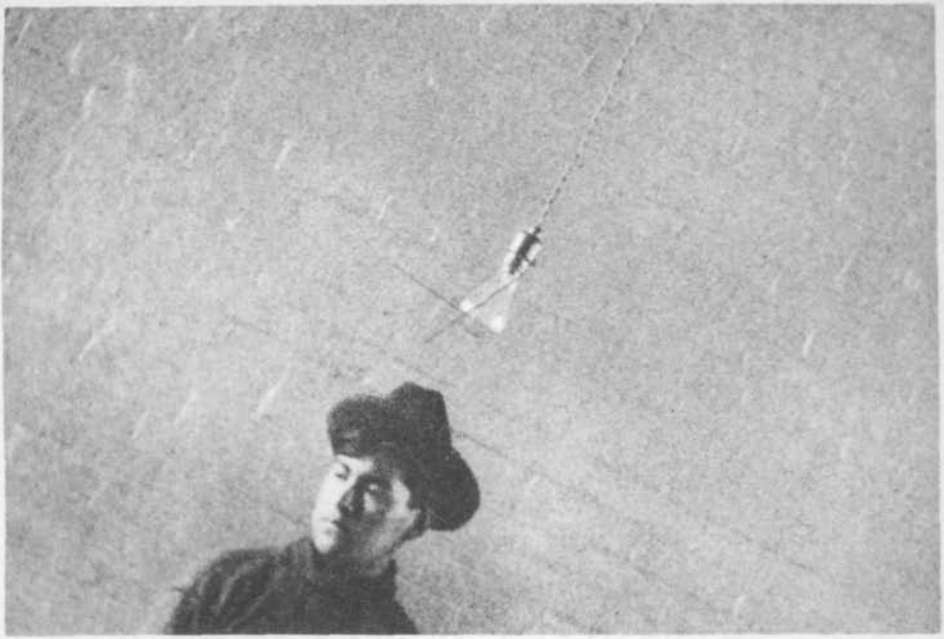

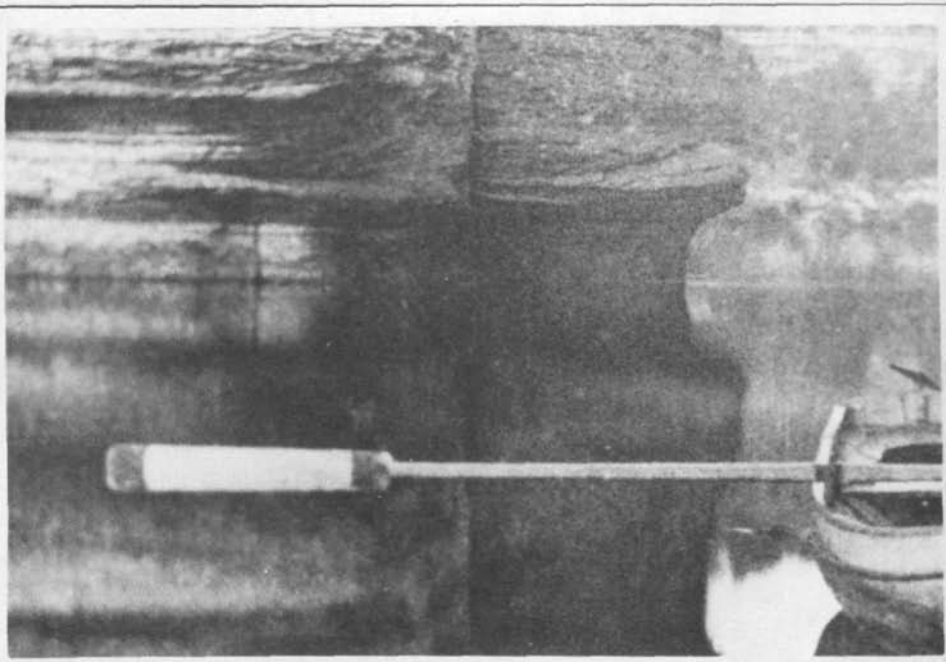

IDEA

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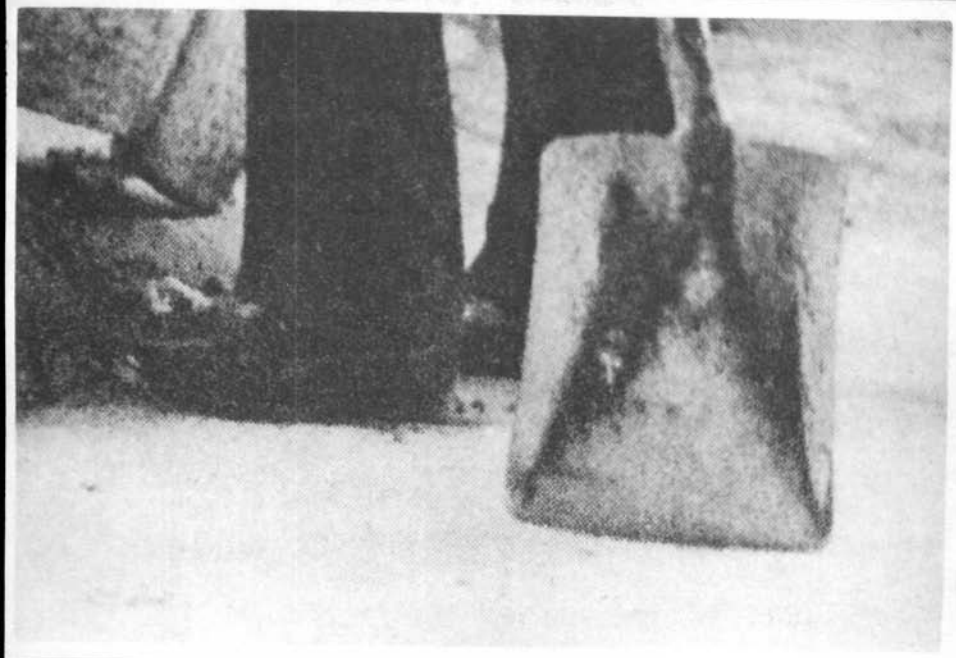

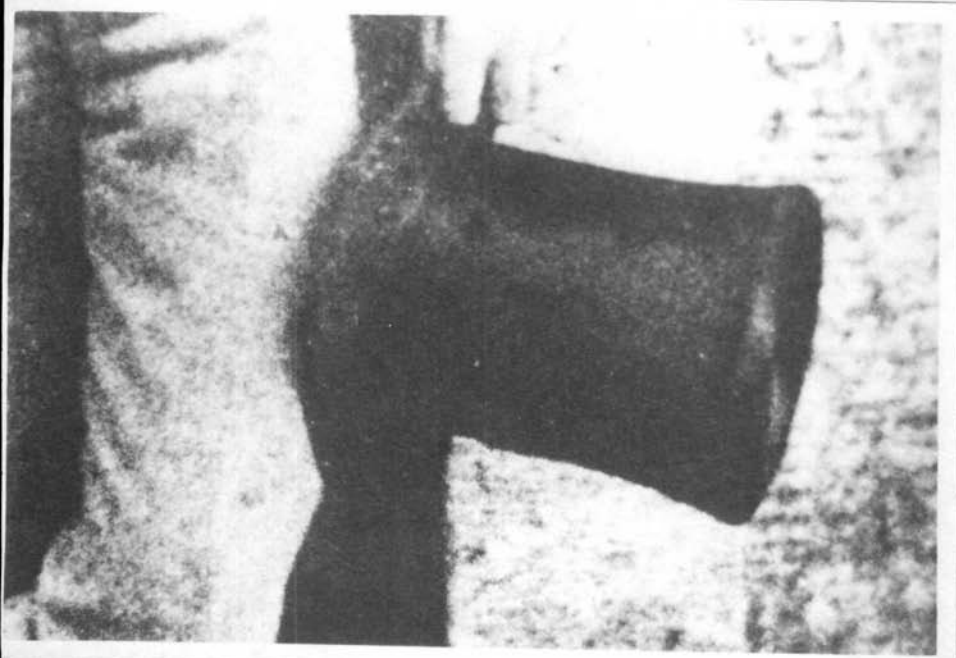

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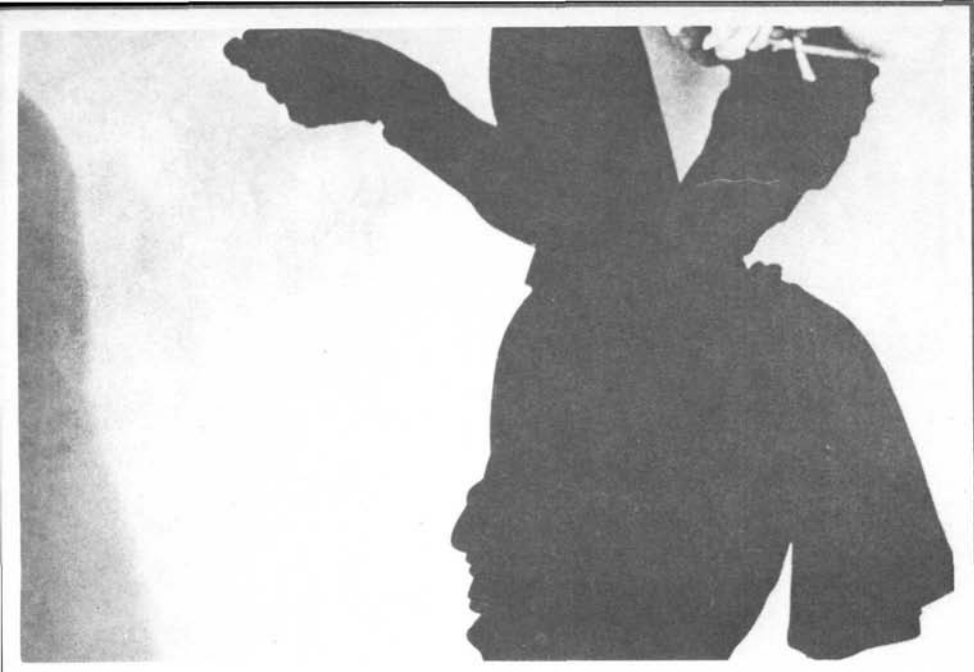

DARK

OBSTRUCTS

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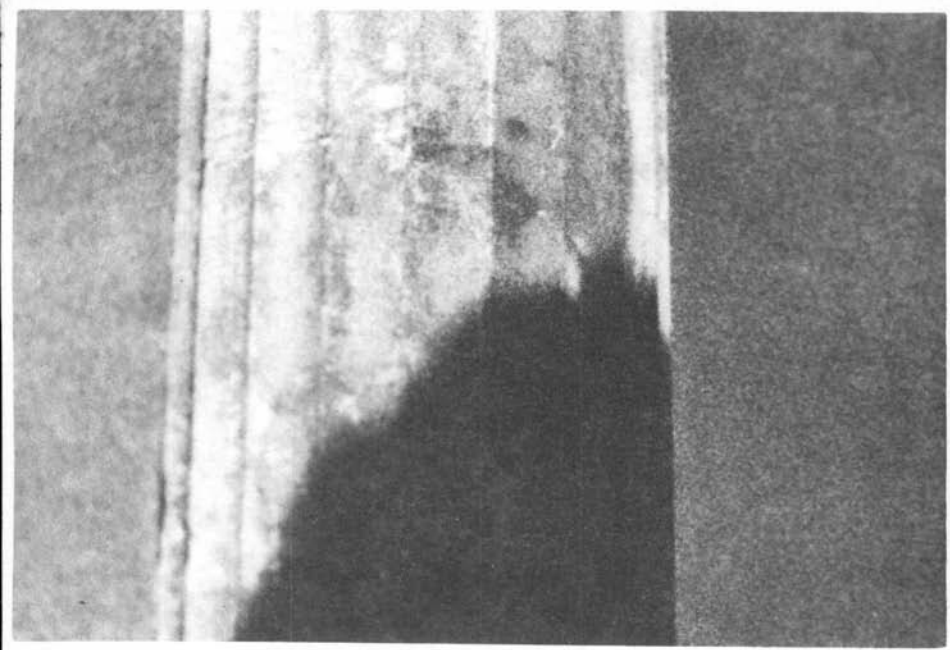

PAST

THOUGHT.

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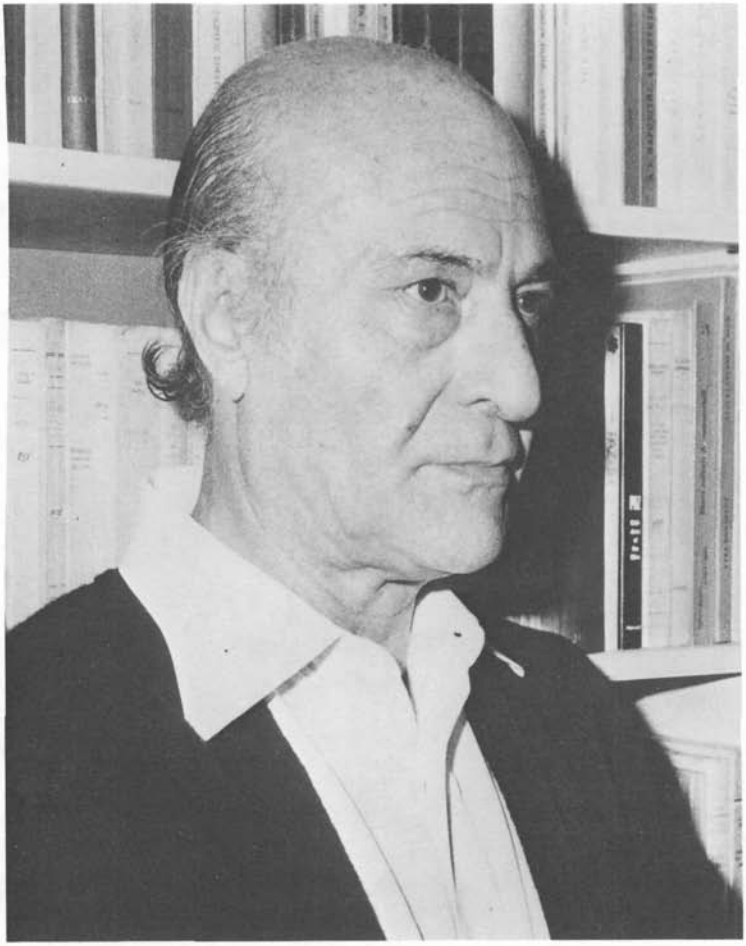
Odysseus Elytis



Greek Photo News

Odysseus Elytis was born in Heraklion, Crete, on November 2nd, 1911, the sixth child of a wealthy soap manufacturer named Panaghiotis Alepoudhelis. He adopted his pen-name, a fusing of the French élite *and allusions to three key Greek concepts:* eleutheros *(freedom),* elpitha *(hope) and* Elene *(Helen of Troy), when he began publishing poems in the '30s. Strongly influenced at the outset by French surrealism, Elytis was an important member of the Generation of the*

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Thirties who redefined the course of Greek letters in the direction of a new Hellenism. He first gained prominence as a poet during World War II, with the publication of the Heroic and Elegiac Song for the Lost Second Lieutenant in the Albanian Campaign. *Today, he and Yannis Ritsos are considered Greece's leading living poets.*

Elytis' best-known work is The Axion Esti *(1959), published in the United States by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 1974 in a translation by Edmund Keeley and George Savidis. A translation of* The Sovereign Sun, Selected Poems *by Kimon Friar was also published by Temple University Press in that year. The work that follows is from Elytis' most recent book,* Maria Nephele, *to be published next year by Houghton Mifflin Company in a translation by Athan Anagnostopoulos. In an interview with Ivar Ivask in a 1975 issue of* Books Abroad *devoted to his work, Elytis said:*

Maria Nephele *means "Maria Cloud". Both names have a mythological connotation. But in my poem Maria is a young modern radical of our age. My poems are usually rooted in my own experience, yet they do not directly transcribe actual events.* Maria Nephele *constitutes an exception. Having finished* The Axion Esti *(this was sixteen years ago), I met this girl in real life, and I suddenly wanted to write something very different from* The Axion Esti. *Therefore I made this girl speak in my poem and express her world-view, which is that of the young generation of today. I am not against her, for I try to understand her viewpoint and that of her generation. I attempt to understand her by having us speak in parallel monologues. My conclusion in this poem is that we search basically for the same thing but along different routes... Maria Nephele is the other half of me. Already in my poem "The Concert of Hyacinths" I wrote: "On the other side I am the same." So, here I am showing the other side of myself.*

Elytis was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature on December 10, 1979. He lives today in Athens, as he has for several decades.

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from Maria Nephele

Note to the Reader: *Mr. Elytis's poems that begin on the left hand page continue on the following left hand page; poems beginning on the right hand page continue on the following right hand page.*

Maria Nephele says:

Speech On Beauty

Be fearful
if you wish to awaken in yourself the instinct of
the Beautiful;

or if not then since we live in the century of photography
immobilize it: whatever next to us
continually acts with incredible gestures:
the Inconceivable!

a) a beautiful woman's two hands (or even a man's) that
would have grown used to the wild doves
b) a wire whose memories would be
all electric current and unsuspecting birds
c) a cry that could be considered eternally timely
d) the irrational phenomenon of the open sea.

You must have understood of course what I mean.

We are the negative of dream
that's why we appear black and white
and live decay
in a minute reality. But
Das Reine Ladies and Gentlemen
kann sich nur darstellen im Unreinen
und versuchst du das Edle zu geben
ohne Gemeines

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And the Antiphonist responds:

The Waterdrop

My lips burn and grief glows
a drop of pure water over the abyss
dark filled with weeds; only the soul
lit up like an old church
shows that we'll die in
spring...

Ding-ding the camomile: I got tired of waiting
ding-ding the mallow flower: I got bored with worrying
ding-ding: man has been such
from the beginning
and I didn't even know it!

Those footsteps on the dry leaves
groaning the bull of Time

The Pelasgian stone masonry in all the length of my life
I walk alongside it
until the dark sea appears
and over it will flare like Bengal lights my three stars!

All things a waterdrop
of beauty trembling on the lashes;
a grief diaphanous like Athos hanging from the sky
with boundless visibility
where all things generate degenerate

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so wird es als das Allerunnaturlichste
says He who succeeded in treading
the Upper Paths.

And he must have known something.

My God what blueness you spend so that we will not see
You!

And the Antiphonist says:

The Dagger

Deep in sleep are the blasphemers and look: our moon
took heart to appear. The mountain uttered again
sacred incomprehensible gravities
from leaf to leaf
the water's fawn and the caper.
On their sides motionless and asleep
the horses very tall
and down below very far half of the valley in white.
Courage. Now. It's the moment
to emerge, my God, from obscurity.
In bathtubs with smooth tiles beautiful women
reclining in water-vapors
mark the deviation: the planet departs.
The husk will appear riddled with black
holes and flashes of lightning and slowly
man will turn inward
until he vanishes entirely.
Courage. Now.
That I may rescue pleasure at least my God.
Give me the dagger.

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Charon falls to his knees and rises again stronger
and falls again strengthless sinking into the abyss.

Of itself the waterdrop powerful over the abyss.

In the village of my language Grief is called the Radiant Lady.

And Maria Nephele responds:

Each Moon Confesses

Each moon confesses and hides among the trees
lest you perceive it;
you've mixed up the seasons so that not even you yourself
know from whence the message will be received.

You're one of those men to whom they gave a big piece of paper
to write and who didn't deign to touch his pen;
to whom luck came like a dimple on the cheek and who never
thought to smile.

You're the man over whom they cast the net in his bath to kill him yet who still rules his kingdom;
who pushes love out the window and then laments
and says the laws wrong him.

Each moon confesses and you pretend you don't understand.
You know you wear the sun—and that before the moon

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It is rude
to offer Charon hand-kissing.

The Antiphonist says:

Eau De Verveine

I said: I am pure
washed with distillation of vervain
90 proof by birth
a Greek among savages.

"Without sighs or fear"

I'll detach my white sign
and direct it
with the speed of a soul
toward the invisible peak.

The infinite exists for us
as the tongue for a deaf-mute.

The Antiphonist says:

The Upper Tarquinia

We who live hung up
in the dust of centuries
in a long and tedious Palazzo Pitti

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sets
you ascend.

Give your time freely
if you want a little dignity left to you.

And Maria Nephele responds:

Speech On Innocence

And I add: your shadow
is a bad counsellor;
walk always
beneath the culminating sun.

"Without limits without terms."

Because Ladies and Gentlemen
what the swallows impute to us
—the spring we didn't bring—
is precisely our innocence.

Maintain Privacy within the Unblushing.

And Maria Nephele responds:

The Eye Of The Locust

Ah
How should I not be afraid of insects!
that are like big bugs that resemble us

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perfect in perspective and proportions
with the white luster at the collar
and the beauty spot on the cheek
we eat sleep circulate
in perfect chiaroscuro
almost beneath the earth;
time for us to knock down the walls
I mean we should open the passageway
in the roof that will allow us
to rise for an instant from within this earth
to the freshness of the tombs!

O Tarquinia the dead who rejoice
in the sun of horses and the air of flutes
will teach us the unbroken continuity

there! at the third height! with the reins of spring
in their fingers Troiluses and Achilleses
face to face—and between the two
myriads of dark green laurel berries
the speckled words of the Gods

Thus once from a virgin's birthing
long before Maria the winds were unleashed
colorful and the young little chicks the nestlings
of all kinds arrived gently
at the huge blue little bellflowers
fearlessly to sit. They are the same ones
that now sway near the trees
with huge rosy ribbons on the branches
as he passes naked with his brick-red body
the Flutist
one foot in front—and the peploi billowing
the souls, the newborn butterflies.

But see what I mean with *all* this
which we the living the idiots, between two dangers

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like huge men way up to there
with open cupboards that chew and eat
with enormous soles of feet
that could easily crush you whole.

Two or three yards beneath the earth

my own alibi. I won't betray it.
I'll never consent to speak about
the immense rooms with the boards that creaked
each time Saint Simeon stepped on them
fierce and left these three black stones
on the lavatory: one for the outside world
one for the inside; the third for the other the invisible one

Think

truly
I'm not much different from Sophie Von Kuhn;
I myself like petrifactions
plaid cloaks flowers
even tuberculosis if there still existed
a way for you to die and be buried princely
armies of the night with ready bayonets
because I still cry secretly
I still delve in dreams
of dark times of the heavens
so much that if at that moment you try to embrace me
you get smeared with stars
In a pit of time

as you walk there unsuspecting
suddenly you feel the houses around you break
and a smell of grandfather and sulfur
and phosphorus spills over
to grab you by the throat and bind you to earth

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not even interesting, forget:
the house is not always smaller than the mountain
man is not always bigger than the flower
all the distances are false
that the eye gives us and in vain I believe
we boast saying
"The world is this."

The world is this
the smoke that chases the dog
the plant that rises and runs with the music
the children that paint on the walls
and open their umbrellas exactly like ancient Aeolians
to ascend carrying along the most virgin part
of things. The synthesis
of all this.

A life full to perfection.
Piero della Francesca last angel
of this earth—hold on!

It is in piety that we shall denude ourselves.

The tomorrow of our life will be life again
transferred to the upper Tarquinia.
Go on. Give the signal. We shall never become soldiers.

We must create antibodies even for responsibility.

The Antiphonist says:

The Holy Inquisition

Mind you what pain subtracts from you
it adds it to you O Man

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Even there heaven gushes forth

something like a very distant daybreak
a sea rolling and white
and always upside-down as through through diopters
I would run microscopic
along the whole length of the black walls of factories
where a blast furnace burns and the statue
of Giorgio de Chirico moves imperceptibly

And I would know

nothing.
A gust of wind all of us and nature doesn't even stir

Nothing!

Well then I've made up my mind:
to isolate some thrill
at random and magnify it three times
mainly out of obstinacy or if not even from a
disposition to see what would happen when
you go counter to money to the wind
to security to agony;
always between Lady and Kore
always between Prosperity and Death.

By its very nature darkness
must be a receiver of stolen goods, too.

And Maria Nephele responds:

Saint Francis Of Assisi

What a pity that the Linguaphone of pleasure
has not yet been discovered!

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Soul sustained
who keeps boasting
struggle as much as you wish
Perfection has no heels

And we need to go ahead
to fill all the Voids
if not then let's destroy ourselves drawing strength from the past.
There will come a time when we will sing upright
and brave to beauty.
Sooner or later
the birds will tame us

Let's go children...

True bravery
must be baptised in the sea
and bring back something of the sea breeze
to the eighth floors of the apartment houses
must leave the battlefields
and grow in love and in the books
and emerge with another more beautiful name
and wait there
to be attacked and blasphemed
and be bound with its hand behind and be tried:

Each era with its Holy Inquisition.

The "void" exists
as long as you do not fall into it.

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Now that "nature" diminishes and the wind is rare
and men rot in woods entirely imaginary
it would be the loftiest wisdom if Saints reconciled
with their bodies
and heard again the angel's voice falling
like a fine spring rain
in the hour when knowledge of every kind is blazing...

Don't say: a justice will be found for us, too.
Don't expect anything from politics and science
The brand new world is also the ancientest
turned inside out.

Don't labor in vain.

With my beauty I
will abolish the notion of the book;

I'll invent the new flowers
and pluck them from my bowels
and crown the public rose
king in the delta of my thighs.

From it will blow the wind
of true innocence
which few men will survive
but all the birds
pecking the nipples of my breasts.

Each era with the Saint Francis of its Assisi.

Try
to guide Technical perfection
to its natural state.

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Maria Nephele says:

The Poets

What shall I do with you O my dear Poets
who for years feign the invincible souls

And for years wait for what I didn't wait for
standing in line like unclaimed articles

What if they call you—none of you replies
outside is havoc the world burns to the skies

Nothing, you demand—I wish I knew with what mind—
your rights over the void!

In times of wealth's adoration, O what indolence,
you exhale the vanity of ownership

Wrapped in palm leaves you keep on carrying
the ill-fated and black-robed earthly sphere

And you become in the stench of the hydrosulfate of
mankind
the voluntary experimental animals of the Divine.

Man is attracted to God
as the shark to blood.

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And the Antiphonist responds:

What Convinces

Please notice my lips: the world depends on them.
From the correlations they dare and the unacceptable
similes just as when on an evening that smells beautiful
we throw the Moon's woodcutter to the ground
he bribes us with a bit of jasmine and we consent...

What convinces I maintain is like a chemical substance that
alters.
Let a girl's cheek be beautiful
All of us with eaten-away faces will return sometime from
the Lands of Truth.
Children I don't know how to explain this
but we need to be replaced by the old Bandits.
That we may send our hand and it will go
there where a woman like an Apple Tree awaits half in the
clouds
totally ignoring the distance that separates us.

And something else: when it starts raining
let us undress and shine like clover...

A mistaken sea cannot exist.

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The Eternal Wager

1
That one day you shall bite into the new lemon
and release
huge quantities of sun from inside it.

2
That all the currents of the seas
suddenly illumined will reveal you
raising the storm to the moral level.

3
That even in your death you shall be again
like water in the sun
that turns cold by instinct.

4
That you shall be catechized by the birds
and a foliage of words will clothe you
in Greek so you will seem invincible.

5
That a waterdrop will culminate
imperceptibly on your eyelashes
beyond pain and after many tears.

6
That all the world's heartlessness will turn to stone
so you can sit regally
with an obedient bird in your palm.

7
That alone at least you shall be united
slowly with the grandeur
of sunrise and of sunset.

Translated by Athan Anagnostopoulos

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How Mrs. Atabal Became a Formidable Woman

Güneli Gün

The dead came to her summons so promptly, even Mrs. Atabal questioned the nature of her calling. Do you suppose . . . I am a fake? she asked herself in the kitchen, bracing her weight, her considerable weight, over the sink; but no, no, I'm a true medium. It's just the Doubting-Thomases, or, more precisely, the Doubting-Tom. She regarded Oldoctor Atabal, memorizing the evening paper again, as if the news would satisfy the questioning angels at the Gates.

"Perhaps the spirits who wander through the night," she said, "suffer from insomnia. Or else, they're lonely for flesh."

"Sleep like tops, I assure you," Oldoctor said. He folded his paper vertically in half, as he always did, preparing to guffaw at worldly actualities. "Those dead I fetched back in my time couldn't recall a thing," he went on; "in fact, folks don't even know they've had a brief croak. They return mad as hell and abuse the doctor for damaging the old tool box, thumping at the ticker inside. It hurts, you know, coming back."

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"You're talking about the soma," Mrs. Atabal said. "I'm much more conversant with the charisma."

"Don't let me stop you," Oldoctor said. "Converse away." Oldoctor thought of himself as a humourous man. Mrs. Atabal thought his humour was an excess of bile.

Perhaps the hold the dead have over the living is just as inventive, Mrs. Atabal reasoned, as the hopes the living have over the dead. It wasn't as if she weren't hurt by her husband's rejection of her calling, but she wished he'd keep the running banter from hitting below the belt. It was understood, by both Atabals, that now they thrived on verbal nips as once they did on rubs which used to be silken. He's just bilious, she thought, not only becase I've finally won the battle of the sexes, but because my calling absorbs me. He's abandoned his calling. He's given up because he sees Death by his own bedside, not as a footman, as he once did, but as the sovereign.

"You think I don't know you're afraid," she said.

"What of?"

"Of Whom," she said meaningfully. "You-Know-Who, that's Who." The way she lingered over the pronoun, Oldoctor knew it was capitalized, universal, in the objective case. He moved his mouth as if he had a mouthful of bologna, which he didn't like, and attempted to swallow without tasting. He wasn't eighty-three for nothing and still spry as he was when he wore knickerbockers.

An age arrives when obituaries acquire a dreadful charm; Mrs. Atabal wasn't one to be subjected passively to our deciduous world. Every evening she studied the list of casualties for names, ones who could safely be recalled. It wasn't too long ago that Mrs. Atabal had appointed herself the local psychopomp. The word *medium* had too many cheap associations in people's minds; she searched for *le mot juste* until she came up with psychopomp. She looked it up in her *Larousse,* just to make sure, and then announced her

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calling to Oldoctor.

"I'm eminently suited to projecting the living into death," she said, "and then back again."

"I do that by falling asleep," Oldoctor said.

Mrs. Atabal knew what tools of trade she needed since her own father had dabbled at the art before he passed away. She must work with a three-legged table which must be round and low. There must be no nails driven into the wood because spirits don't like to come to metal objects. She ordered such a table at the establishment of an old joiner back in her home town and waited for it to be delivered with the excitement of a young bride.

The table smelled of the woodland, yet the wood was silken to the touch, like the hair of a hamadryad. The ebony pentacle in the center glowed dark as a deep well in which all sounds are absorbed into an immense echo. And the letters of the alphabet, fashioned out of mother-of-pearl, had been inlaid so impeccably, not a single seam could be felt. The three legs were for tapping out yes-no answers; but the alphabet was meant for spirits who knew how to spell.

Mrs. Atabal said some spirits are liars. Spirits being what they are, discerning their identities soon became something of a problem. One way of getting around liars, Mrs. Atabal thought, was to call up souls whose veracity had been established in life. It's hard for the dead to give up their habits, she reasoned; like a phonograph record they play out the same answers until they wear out. She didn't know what happened to worn-out souls.

Mrs. Atabal devised tests for those spirits who came to make an idiot out of her. She soon learned how to make such spirits contradict themselves by laying logical traps for them. She would ask, with a certain gleam in her eye, "What would you say if I asked you who you are?" If the presence was a true one, no harm done. If it were a liar, it would have to

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reveal itself, for lying is the nature of the liar; and two lies, amazingly enough, make a truth. Often impostors lost their tempers and hurled alphabetically mediated insults at the clever woman; and Mrs. Atabal mistreated them right back, ordering them to get their asses off her pretty table. Sometimes the liars complied.

Only pure spirits were welcome at Mrs. Atabal's table since she could bring out the logic of the spirit's nature which was there at the beginning. There was advantage in dealing with such humors, in the ancient sense, because they were easily recognized and easily remembered afterwards. . .like, well, like stock characters. Pure souls were indeed flat; but what's wrong with flatness? she asked. A flat spirit was the necessary vehicle for conveying one kind vision of existence; and Mrs. Atabal knew her role was that of a choreographer improvising situations for her spirits. All I must do, she said to herself, is to get hold of a pure soul and nail it to the table.

The liars, on the other hand, could not be depended on not to change on her, bedevil her with vague apprehensions. What's more, liars were given to self-dramatizations and irrational utterances as if they were permanent exceptions to the rules, to logic, to habit. There was too much irrational, hysterical behavior among the living to be bothered with the same sort of confusion of motives among the dead.

Mrs. Atabal needed three persons to sit around her table. The first was to be a wise person, a post, she thought, she was suited to very well. The second had to be an innocent which was a hard person to find. And the third place went to courage. Oldoctor might be an adequate sitter for that, but he couldn't be persuaded. "If I wanted to know what my wife thinks," he said, "I'd talk to her. In other words, sir, if I wanted advice, I'd get it first-hand."

Did he mean Mrs. Atabal was a fake? "Don't put words

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in my mouth!'' he said. ''I think she possesses what's called animal magnetism. Oh, she was an incredible beauty once. She attracted people like flies. Now that she's eaten a mountain around her elegant bones, the magnetism has fled underground. A fat woman attracts unaccountable little details you and I never perceive.''

It wasn't the spirit world that haunted his wife, as one might suppose, but the world of the senses. ''Don't you see?'' he said. ''If all the senses are synchronized, the spirit emerges.''

On Friday nights Mrs. Atabal was always looking for innocents and courageous thirds. Sometimes her sister would drop in from her thirty-two years of solitude with many baskets of citrus fruits, but not very often, as the widow's clock was set differently from everybody else's. Oldoctor Atabal would tear into one of her tender-skinned tangerines and say, ''Cormorant!'' That's what he called his sister-in-law because that bird too will dive under and come up in unexpected places. ''You plump cormorant, how do you get these tangerines to smell so good?''

''Plenty of shit,'' the old widow said.

Mrs. Atabal had always outstripped her sister, in looks, in talent, in fortune. She had, even as a little girl, occupied the larger chamber in their father's heart. Oh, my sister's always been an imperfect copy, a bad impression, Mrs. Atabal thought; and things always happen to her because she can't invent happenings. Even now when they'd both grown stout, her sister's fat wasn't distributed evenly, having settled, as it were, mostly where she sat and sat. The copper hair they shared in common was faded in both their cases, but Mrs. Atabal had found the exact, devastating shade once more. Both had gray eyes, but Mrs. Atabal's, even now, were luminous as Athena's; her fingers were long and dexterous but her sister's were small and coarse even before she began

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working with soil. She's still a bad job, Mrs. Atabal sighed, roundly eroded by the winds of fate.

The widow was, however, a natural for Friday nights. Without bothering what spirits had come and why, she'd ask her three basic questions: was the citrus crop going to find a good market? when would her living son come home? did it have any news of her dead firstborn? She didn't want Mrs. Atabal to disturb the sleep of her late son. "That wife of his rode him to death, as it is," she said. After she was answered at the table, the widow would doze off as Mrs. Atabal set up truth tables, postulated, inferred with existential qualifiers. Mrs. Atabal thought all that was really necessary was the widow's finger on the demi-tasse. "Consciousness isn't required of courage," she said.

One Friday evening, when crisp fall rains began to drizzle into the bay, Mrs. Atabal was determined to take her table and her sister visiting. Mrs. Atabal, the heart-snatcher of brilliant soirées in her youth, was reduced to a few hands of bezique with Oldoctor, tea, and yawns. Oldoctor Atabal, who was almost twenty years older than his wife, had been losing classmates for over three decades now; the few who remained were afraid of walking their coronaries up the steep Atabal hill. Besides, these old geezers had a single theme in their repertoires. "My! What happened to you?" they'd ask Mrs. Atabal, wheezing. "You used to look like that movie star, what's her name, the one who marries everybody." Mrs. Atabal didn't relish the comparisons of her former self to any glorified cheap woman; she had been faithful to a man twenty years her senior, a difficult man at that. "Beauty is an inadequate metaphor," she informed those geezers who mourned the passage of time.

Solitude wasn't something she'd have chosen for herself; it was Oldoctor who insisted on building their house suspended between heaven and earth so that he could survey the sunny Aegean city at his feet, the dark ocean beyond the bay.

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Neither the terraced stairway up the hill nor the lack of company bothered him much; he was a man who bothered with nothing but the view. They lived away from the fashionable quarter by the quay where one might meet one's sort of people, just shopping. "We may as well live on an island," she often said, "surrounded, as we are, by neighbors who change into pajamas to receive guests and take them off to go to bed." There was hardly ever a knock on the door that brought Mrs. Atabal any pleasure. They had a child, a grown daughter, who lived on the other side of the planet. Sometimes the mailman brought a letter.

But Mrs. Atabal was someone to make something out of desperate prospects, as intelligent women, she supposed, do everywhere. Her powers of concentration, which Oldoctor dismissed as some sort of animal magnetism, became manifest to her as she lost her shape which, curiously enough, had been an impediment. She became, she felt it, connected to the world of the unseen. And she tended to her spirits just as her sister fertilized her trees to insure an earthly crop. She too brought the fruits of her labor to the table, a little magic table with three legs.

That particular Friday evening, she was in search of an innocent, although she already knew who it was going to be. "Nobody's as innocent as Captain Berk," she told her sister who'd just surfaced; and before the old widow could catch her breath, Mrs. Atabal made her put her coat back on. "You'd never believe the décor in Oldoctor's old office," Mrs. Atabal said. "Oh, she's pretty, you now, but definitely sleazy, as officers' wives often are." Then noticing the cloud over her sister's face, she quickly added. "I don't mean you, dear, although your husband was a military man."

Captain Berk and young Mrs. Berk rented the basement apartment below the Atabals, converted from Oldoctor's former office. It was Mrs. Atabal's idea to get some living

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people up on the hill; and it was she who supervised the conversion because Oldoctor's architectural notions often ended up in disaster, both in terms of taste and of structure. It was a good thing to have people around the place, she thought; if we died, no one would be the wiser for months. Loneliness is only for God.

The apartment was a small, two room suite. The Berks slept in the old consultation room, entertained in the waiting. The spirits of ether and camphor still lingered in the kitchen which once served Oldoctor as a laboratory. Good enough lodgings for people on a captain's pay, and not a bad place, considering the lovely garden that surrounded the house. Oldoctor's sweet-faced dahlias nodded at the windows.

And, inexplicably, the Berks had been buying more furniture than the little suite could hold. Fancy too. Velvet curtains, satin bergères, mirrors with carved frames. Who paid for the stuff? Mrs. Atabal suspected something was going on, but she didn't whisper a word to Oldoctor; she'd rather force the truth out by her own powers, experiment a bit, than engage in idle speculation.

"I'd like to see what she's bought now," Mrs. Atabal said to her sister. "Probably something grotesque. Poor Mrs. Berk doesn't seem to know a beautiful woman must remain true to the metaphor her endowment implies."

"Count me out," Oldoctor said. "This isn't a night to stir anywhere. Besides that Captain is a pup. Which reminds me, young Mrs. Berk has been looking listless lately, have you noticed? It's a crime to let a beautiful woman lose her high spirits." He burdened his wife with a sample bottle of vitamin B_6. "Tell that pretty creature they'll give her sweet dreams," he said on his way to bed where he hoped to catch a few himself.

Mrs. Atabal whisked her sister, her table, the vitamins,

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much annoyed. "Ever since he stopped practicing, he's become an old hen," she told her sister. "Squawk-squawk-this, cluck-cluck-that! Although he's under the impression he's still a cock. It embarrasses me, the way he courts any young thing that comes his way. He says blessed is the man who can look."

"So let him," said the old widow.

As they descended the stairs, the widow stopped and turned to face her sister behind her, struggling with her table.

"Do you suppose," the widow said, "it was fortunate that my captain died so young? I remember him in his uniform with his fair moustache out to here, and in the buff, hung down to there."

"But the doctor," Mrs. Atabal said, swallowing an inexplicably deep sorrow that rose in her throat, "is wonderful in his own way."

"Spirits, come!" Mrs. Atabal said as soon as they convened around the little table.

The old widow, who'd never been a beauty, touched the bottom of the demi-tasse almost imperceptibly, her wrist so pliable for a woman her size and age. A natural, no doubt about it.

"You're pressing too hard!" Mrs. Atabal admonished the Captain.

As soon as he lightened his touch, the cup began to move. Tentatively at first, then slowly out of the pentacle into the spirit-drome; and it circled the alphabet three times.

"Welcome," said Mrs. Atabal, "and God be with you."

The cup went back to the center of the pentacle, acknowledging Mrs. Atabal's salutation, and waited there.

"If I asked you who you are, what would you say?"

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The cup just stood there, perhaps to consider the elements of the condition, or else how to dodge it. Then, without warning, it took after the alphabet with such an astonishing speed that Mrs. Berk, who was the stenographer for the evening, could hardly keep up with it.

"What did it say?" cried out the old widow whose reading skills were a bit rusty. "Tell me what it said."

Mrs. Berk read the message out loud. " 'This is a house of brostitution.' "

"It's obviously a spelling error," Captain Berk said. "I'm sure it means 'prostitution.' "

"No error," Mrs. Atabal said. "What we have here is the spirit of General Korman, my husband's late friend. I'd know him anywhere, the 'brovincial poop'! He never managed to straighten out his b's and his p's. But he was terribly honest. So honest, in fact, it was a wonder he ever made general." She laughed. "His presence here would displease my husband. Although he doesn't believe all this, he likes to keep his friends out of my stable."

"I'd like to see generals given the run around," the Captain said, "even dead ones. Please go ahead, by all means."

"Tell him to go back to Hell," the old widow said, "where he belongs, the bad-mouth."

"Let's first aggravate him a bit," said the Captain.

Mrs. Atabal was about to intercede when the cup began moving once more with what they now knew was martial impatience.

" 'Bimb!' " it said.

"I think he's referring to me," the Captain laughed, looking at the faces of the three women.

In a few moments the place was in an uproar. Everyone tried to come up with a formula to make the General's spirit mind its manners, hold its tongue, at least speak when spoken to. The cup kept firing insults.

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"'Back of batsies!'" "'Baber-soldier!'" "'Bromiscuous bunks!'" "'Berfidious best!'" "'Bornographic brunes!'" etc.

"I refuse to take all this down!" Mrs. Berk said. Her khaki colored hair stood all around her head like a lion's mane.

"'Bussy!'" the cup spelled out for her.

"You have 'brurient' interests, General," the Captain teased the cup.

"'Bubby!'" it said.

The callers all removed their indices from the bottom of the cup, as if by concensus. It waited as they contemplated this implacable ghost.

"How strange!" Mrs. Atabal said.

"That's right!" said the old widow.

"Is this all on the up and up?" Captain Berk wanted to know.

"Don't look now," the old widow said, cupping her mouth her hand, "but there's a man at the window."

There was a pale man at the window, looking in. He had a starchy head with a few wisps of hair carefully attached to his emaciated skull. You could see each hair individually crossing from one ear the length of his cranium to the other side. The eyes seemed to need treatment against trachoma, the way they drooped feverishly on his face, one slightly lower than the other. He looked like a man who did distasteful things after everybody goes home after work. The feeder at the zoo who appears with cold buckets of flesh as the bell begins to buzz. Maybe he was a man hired to kick back survivors who clutch at lifeboats already overloaded. No, no, he was a man. A man who'd keep his face closed as he passes one by on the street. Only he was frozen on the windowpane as the four pairs of eyes were frozen by the image it displayed. The man looked as if he wished to speak but a deep black crack in the middle of his lip seemed to pain him. It was when he suddenly

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smiled that the women in the room screamed.

The smile couldn't have lasted but a moment, yet it was a smile one always suspects is directly behind one's head, always there, but invisible. The women's screaming, as if it were an alarm he'd been trained to heed, sent the captain off his seat. He rushed and snatched his ceremonial saber off the wall and charged.

By the time the pursuing party reached the door, the man had already disappeared. They listened for footsteps running down the terraced garden stairs. Nothing. All they could hear was the drizzling rain.

"So, he won't show himself," said Mrs. Berk, clutching her chest. Her voice seemed so weary. "I have some tea on and chestnuts roasting in the oven."

The smell of chestnuts filled the room with some measure of cosiness. Mrs. Berk, who was shivering, put on her new sable, the same fur Mrs. Atabal was wondering about.

"Was that the General then?" Captain Berk asked.

"No," Mrs. Atabal said. "I don't do materializations." She placed her index on the cup once again. "If the General's still around we'll ask him who the man was."

"It's way past my bedtime," the old widow said. "I wonder what Oldoctor is dreaming about upstairs."

The Captain shrugged. "I'm through being the innocent," he said.

"You come then, sweetheart," Mrs. Atabal said to Mrs. Berk who came docilely enough. "Tell us, General," Mrs. Atabal went on, "who was the man at the window?"

"'The beebing-dom is the podder,'" it said.

"The potter!" Mrs. Atabal cried. "Who's the potter?"

"Well," said the old widow, "potters are pure in heart. In the old days people who went on pilgrimages exchanged their money with a potter's."

"Potters don't sleep nights but get up to feed the fires,"

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the Captain said.

"Potters don't sleep nights but get up to feed the fires," the Captain said.

"I wish we could be sure it was the potter," Mrs. Atabal said. "Maybe in the morning we could all look around the bazaar where the potters spread their wares."

"One thing's for sure," the Captain said, "that was no spirit at the window. You saw how quickly he took to his heels as soon as I laid a hand on my saber."

"He must have been attracted to the light," Mrs. Atabal said. "Maybe he's sick. Maybe he didn't hear Oldoctor no longer practices."

"You are all such fools!" Mrs. Berk cried suddenly. "He came for me! Didn't you notice how pale his face was?" The eyes in her sallow, exquisite face burned like those of a starving animal. Perhaps a wolf. A dangerous beast of some sort. "What will I answer you, Mrs. Atabal, when you call me to your table Friday nights and demand my name?"

"Heaven forbid, child!" Mrs. Atabal gasped. "What things you say!"

"You suspect me of a secret," the young wife went on. "And you're right. If I answer you at all, I must tell you the truth. Why must you have the truth when lies bring us all we have?"

"It's just a game, my pretty," her husband said. "No one is asking you any questions."

He stroked her tawny hair which would not lie down. She shivered so in her sable coat, she was desperate as if there were no escape from this narrow room, as if the world outside were remote and ghostly.

"The Peeping-Tom's long gone," he said, helplessly.

"The man at the window is there in the dark!" the young woman said to her husband, implacable as if she were being prodded by all that she had ever been and all that the future had in store for her. "Please, understand! If I don't run to

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get there first, he'll still be waiting.''

The smell of chestnuts forgotten in the oven invaded the room; an acrid smoke clawed at the callers' throats. The old widow began to moan and rock like like a bereaved person in expectation of a dreaded but as yet inconceivable event. Mrs. Atabal clutched her enigmatic table.

''But the man was only the potter,'' she said, trying to insert reason back into the proceedings. She felt that things were getting away from her as the field of magnetism transferred itelf to the young wife.

Her starving eyes fixed on Mrs. Atabal's, the young woman ripped off the two heavy clasp bracelets she always wore on her two wrists, bracelets much like those worn by bondswomen a long time ago. Two puckered, wizened old wounds covered the veins where the pulse beats with such intensity.

''I've already returned once,'' said the young woman. ''Nothing there but sleep. Empty sleep where dreams won't appear.''

''Ahh!'' cried Mrs. Atabal in fear and sorrow. Fat tears fell down her ruined cheeks. She struck her fist against the beautiful table made of willow-wood like the maiden who smote the harp so passionately that milk gushed from her breasts. And she cried again: ''Ahh!''

''Ahh!'' called out the cup on the table.

That was the first time Mrs. Atabal ever gave voice to a hollow object. And her table, without any warning at all, turned on her. It just fell, pivoting on one leg, on its side; and the three legs, like a three-pronged weapon, advanced on the mistress of ceremonies. Her table was attracted to her with deadly intent. The game that began with logic, as games do, turned into a manifestation beyond her control, a loss, an end without a beginning. That's how Mrs. Atabal received

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the curse, or the power, to animate the table made of wood. She no longer owned the table; the table owned her. And that's how come this is an old wives' tale because only young wives heed the calling at the peril of their lives.

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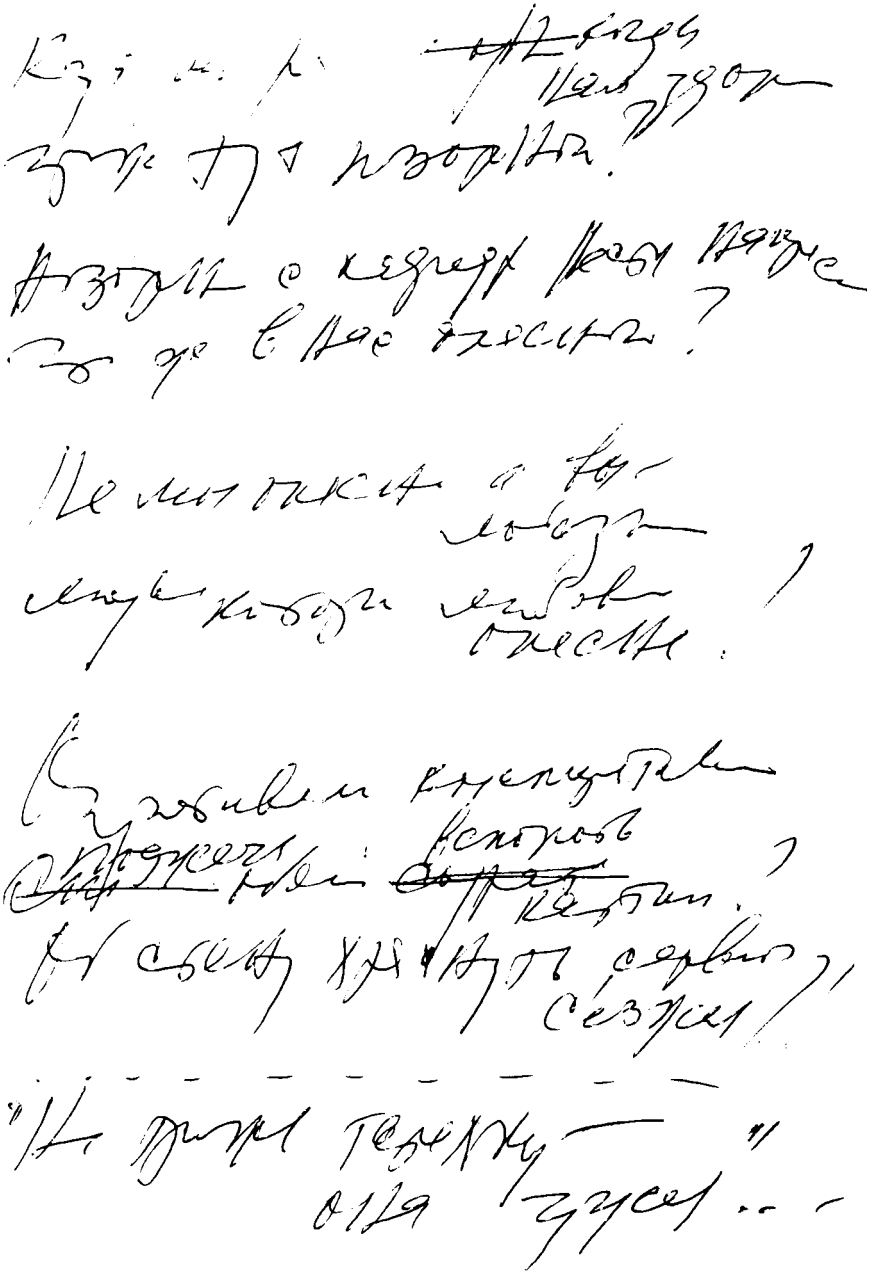

An Andrei Voznesensky manuscript page.

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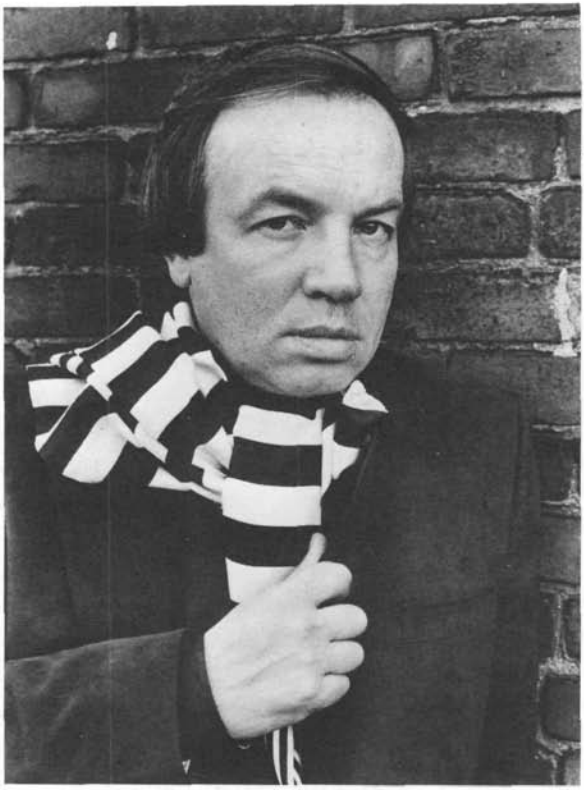

Gerard Malanga

Andrei Voznesensky

The Art of Poetry XXVI

In 1963, Nikita Khrushchev personally warned Andrei Voznesensky to get out of Russia. The warning came too late. Public readings by writers including Voznesensky and Yevtushenko had already grown to the point that huge stadiums could hardly contain the audiences clamoring to ear the new poetry. Voznesensky's reply was something new as well.

"I am a Russian poet," he announced, "and I am not going anywhere."

Since that moment, neither the Russian public's love affair with Voznesensky's poems nor the suspicions his work arouses

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in conservative Soviet circles has abated in the slightest. Although he has been in and out of official favor with his government, it is now an international audience which sponsors his devotion to poetry and his belief in its powers to change the world's spirit.

Inevitably, his art has become as cosmopolitan as his fame; his Russian themes and sources flow easily into poems about strippers and soft drinks; from his visits to Europe and America over the last fifteen years, his poems are filled with references to Marilyn Monroe, blue jeans, Paris motorcycle gangs (which he calls "hellhounds with pisspots on their heads").

He is a small man—about the size of a Beatle—with firm Slav features. When he reads, his voice is equal to every music his language offers, and he whips his poems toward the audience with a right arm like a tweed cobra; he delivers his lines with a passionate, almost frightening intensity. During performances, crowds have been known to rush the podium to touch the cuffs of his trousers; after them, poetry groupies seek the kind of backstage benediction Dylan Thomas used to like to give. His name shows up in literary journals while his face appears in fashion magazines. He is a legend in Russia; he is recognized in small airports in the American South.

In the dark, in the huge sports arena,
fourteen thousand great bards are packed tight.
Now I, the last poetry reader,
will step into the glare of the lights.

INTERVIEWER

In 1963, you and Yevtuschenko and some of the other poets were Russia's equivalent of the Beatles.

VOZNESENSKY

Yes. That was when rock and roll was forbidden in Russia. Suddenly young people who were longing for that kind of thing started coming to our readings in sports stadiums and

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applauding for us as if we were rock stars. We would find ourselves reading poems for 14,000 people. Now those who want to hear folk music or rock music can have it, and I'm happy to see poetry separating itself from that.

INTERVIEWER

With so many rock bands in Russia now, can you say whether the death of Elvis Presley had very much impact? Is he taken seriously?

VOZNESENSKY

Certainly not seriously. But for many young people he was a symbol of mass involvement with rock, of the internal rhythm of the human being.

INTERVIEWER

One reason I asked is because you became famous when you were very young, and in the West, people who get famous early in life, for example Presley or the Beatles, find it impossible to continue later on at their original levels of energy.

VOZNESENSKY

Yes. It's very strange to me to be talking about my own fame—certainly I am known, yes. I don't worry so much about being popular. In the beginning, you see, we were a group, an angry group of younger poets like Akhmadulina and Yevtushenko and myself. It is a Russian tradition to listen to poetry, but before us there had been no big audiences. A poet didn't sell many copies of a book of poems. If a poet sold a thousand copies, he was very happy. Then we began these readings, and the audiences grew—at first small audiences, and then several hundred people, and then finally as many as 14,000 in a stadium; it was like a sport. For me, it was a little boring. Because it's impossible for 14,000 people in a soccer stadium to hear you. It's impossible to speak intimately.

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INTERVIEWER

Is there a Russian Bob Dylan?

VOZNESENSKY

There are several.

INTERVIEWER

I ask because at least some of Dylan's work is accorded the status of poetry—

VOZNESENSKY

Certainly; but as I said, I'm now more interested in the distinctions between poetry and rock.

INTERVIEWER

Is there any similarity between the audiences that would go to hear Dylan and yours in the Soviet Union?

VOZNESENSKY

It is impossible to compare American with Russian audiences. In Russia I don't need advertising. They put a small piece of paper on a door somewhere announcing a reading and that's enough; in Russia everybody talks to everybody else, word gets around, certainly in Moscow, and everybody comes, even if they don't like poetry, just to look at you. But here, for example, if you stop somebody's car and say, "A Russian poet wants to read," you hear, "What? A Russian poet? Read a book? *What?*"

INTERVIEWER

Even so, you have been very fortunate in having your works translated into English by some of our best writers.

VOZNESENSKY

Yes, I work with them. I especially like translations by W. H. Auden, Stanley Kunitz and William Jay Smith. But many others, too—all are very good. I've learned a lot of new

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English words that way. I learned some new words on this tour. "Speeding!"—I like this word. I didn't know it before. And I always knew the word "fuck-off," but I didn't know "fuck-up." So on this trip, I have two new knowledges: "Speeding" and "fuck-up." "Fuck-up" I like very much.

INTERVIEWER

You tell a fuck-up to fuck-off.

VOZNESENSKY

Certainly, yes.

INTERVIEWER

You've sold a great many records in Russia. How many recordings have you done? What are they like?

VOZNESENSKY

I've made four records of me reading my poems and seven albums reading with singers and music. I prefer the ones where I am simply reading by myself. My new album will be ready for release when I get back to Russia. It's three records, actually. One will be of all my pop songs—all my poems that have been made into songs—and another that will be me reading my poems. On one of my records we did an interesting experiment. The composer Rodion Shchedrin, the husband of the famous ballet dancer, Plisetskaya, put my voice together with some old Russian music—not folk music but perhaps for a funeral: voices weeping, choir, bells ringing, and lots of noise like today's cities; I recite my poems against this background. I'm like another instrument for him. I'm not a singer, but he uses my voice like an instrument. Sometimes I improvise, and the orchestra tries to follow me. It's most interesting when I'm fighting against the orchestra. I get loud, they get loud, and then they kill me. That's very symbolic of how today's terrible technology, how it kills the soul. They get so loud, that I open my mouth, but no one can hear me. Maybe sometimes I scream dirty words,

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but nobody understands because it's impossible to hear me. Great noise. And sometimes they accompany me very politely and I fuck them. It's very interesting. It's not just voice and music.

INTERVIEWER

When you write what you call pop songs, do you try to reach the same audience...

VOZNESENSKY

No! When I write, I don't think about the audience. I write poems, and then somebody sings them. We have a lot of small groups, as you do here. In Moscow alone we have four or five thousand, maybe ten thousand, small rock groups. And they take your poems and they become songs, and some of them get popular. Two of my poems won prizes last year as songs. One was called "Don't Disappear"; the other was a sort of gypsy rock song. Right now I'm working on a rock opera, based on my long poem, *Story Under Full Sail*, which is about a young American girl of fifteen and a Russian about forty. It's set in the beginning of the nineteenth century in California. She waits for him for sixteen years and becomes the first nun in San Francisco. The Virgin Mary is one of the characters both in the poem and in the rock opera. The composer I'm working with combines rock music and old Russian church bells and a Russian Orthodox choir—something very new.

INTERVIEWER

I wonder if you think there is a connection between poetry and alcohol, or drugs, or more specifically between poetry and what Rimbaud called derangement of the senses.

VOZNESENSKY

There is some connection. But if you drink a lot it's not so good, because it's *instead* of. I see more of a connection with sex. Flesh and blood. When you are tired after sex, it's very

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hard to make a reading. I'm not an actor. I only try to repeat my way of writing poetry, you see. I remember my feelings, and I remember the circumstances. If I sometimes change the style of one or another poem, it's because I'm not a machine, I'm not a robot. Giving a reading gives me physical pleasure. And when the audience is good to you, you get to read better; they are coming to you and you to them—another example of the connection between sex and reading. But I tried marijuana here, as an experiment, when I was very close to Allen Ginsberg.

INTERVIEWER

Other drugs too?

VOZNESENSKY

Allen once gave me one he said was a little bit like LSD but something new. It was a white drug and I became very ill after. It was very strange. I took this drug when I was staying at the Chelsea Hotel; Allen gave me this drug and went away. I spent most of the day in a blackout. But I later had to get up and go read in Town Hall. I was a little high. I thought, "People will think I am drunk." I was in a strange mood. For the first time in my life I forgot my lines, and didn't know why I was there. But when I saw the audience and after Robert Lowell (I think) introduced me, my old reflexes began working again. I was like a reading machine. It was very difficult for me to come on to the music of poetry because of this drug experience. I read the first poem by instinct; the second poem was hard but then it got better and better as the poetry took over and the drug went away. And I forgot about the drug. One doctor told me that it was very good; I was destroyed after the reading; I was not longing for more drugs. Drugs don't help poetry. When you try to write on pot, you think it's very good, but you are false because you have no real feelings. You think it is very good, but later when you read it, it's bullshit.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you like Ginsberg's poetry?

VOZNESENSKY

Yes, I like his "Howl." I love "Howl" and "Kaddish." He came to see me in the Soviet Union, and people thought he was mad. He went to Mayakovsky's grave and fell down crying and weeping and praying to him. He is very interesting. I feel he is a type of guru. We had a very good reading together on a ferryboat in New York. I read my poems and he read translations. But I'm very sad that at another reading, somebody I don't know personally said, "Please don't ask Allen to come to the stage, because so-and-so will be upset, they don't approve of him." I was upset and I repeated this to Allen who said, "Oh, Andrei, don't start anything please. I'll be here in the hall, in the auditorium. I'll be happy." But I like to read together with him, because he is a great performer. We read in a church once, for Bangladesh.

INTERVIEWER

Stepping into the middle of our literary wars must seem strange to you.

VOZNESENSKY

It is a little bit strange, yes. But you see, I'm not a chauvinist. I would not say only good words about my country, only good words about our poets. There's a lot of backstage intrigue among some of our poets. They too are jealous of one another. And I hate this jealousy. You ask one of our poets about another, and he says, "Oh, no—he's not—well, he's nice of course—but he's a piece of shit." I hate it.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever been jealous of another poet?

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VOZNESENSKY

I'm honest. When I was young, I didn't like to have someone else get more applause than me on stage. And now—maybe I have too much pride, because I like really good work—when a cheap poet has a cheap success, I think it is sad. Because it is against poetry. Our level is very high. You know my poetry; maybe it's strange for you that it appeals to a thousand, maybe to a hundred thousand people. It is very complicated and I am not sure that they all understand it. The majority don't understand poetry. But they understand the spirit. Like in a church. Not all the people who come to church understand the words, but they understand the sense. Here it is too easy now to go to an audience, for example, and take off your trousers and get applause. But in Russia our audience is serious, and if you make cheap poetry, maybe with jokes, it will not be so popular. We've educated them, you see!

INTERVIEWER

You've spoken about the connection between poetry and sex, and poetry and drugs. How about between poetry and athletics? Jack Kerouac once said that he thought of writing as an athletic accomplishment. He was talking about the physical exhaustion, I guess.

VOZNESENSKY

Well, I lose weight during a big reading, like after playing basketball or volleyball. I put it back on later. Sometimes in Russia I read for several hours, with maybe a small break, and next day I am exhausted. At a reading I get more and more physically involved. In Russia sometimes you read for three hours straight, and then they want more; you have to stop because they close the concert hall, and so afterwards you go to a party to drink and read more poems. We don't have parties like the ones you have here, where everybody stands around and shakes hands. We sit and drink, and later they ask you to read poetry and you read until morning. It is a

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Russian specialty. More people come in, and you read again. I don't mean non-stop, but all night, you know.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think your background in architecture has a great deal to do with your poetry?

VOZNESENSKY

Yes. The essential question in either case is one of structure. When I first began writing, I was condemned as a formalist. In Russia, that's a dirty word, certainly according to socialist critical dogma at that time: Pasternak was considered a formalist. But I had to think of structure, of form. I think it's man's duty to be accurate. Man can't just be blah, blah, blah, without end. When you make a building, the form must be sound—sound forever. And I think it is the same in poetry. Yes? It is like architecture. You need a style as much as a bathroom. If the construction is good for your time, it will be good for all time.

INTERVIEWER

Is there anybody in particular you trust to tell you when a poem's no good?

VOZNESENSKY

Not really. I test my work on friends, but I never do as they advise me. Poems have their own fates, like children. You have only to give birth to them. Certainly, you struggle for them: to publish, to get them read and heard. But I'm a little fatalistic about the destiny of a given poem.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel separated from a poem, once you've completed it?

VOZNESENSKY

Yes. Although I can make a new connection in a public

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performance, particularly with my most recent work. That's why I feel sad not to have been able to read my very new poems on this tour; there's been no time to have them translated. In a performance in Russia, I read for two or three hours without a break; the first hour is all new stuff. After that, the audience sends up requests. Sometimes they send up questions—they try to turn the reading into a press conference, which I don't like, though some of my friends like that kind of thing. Yevtushenko likes it very much. He loves public meetings, speeches, discussions. I don't like to mix that up with readings. It breaks the mood, like jokes after church.

INTERVIEWER

You never bring a book or manuscript on stage. Do you memorize everything?

VOZNESENSKY

That's the way I write. I write without paper. I walk around, composing and revising, thinking out variants until the poem is finished. But once I type or write something (sometimes I dictate) I don't like to change it. With rainy weather you get a rainy mood, and you can never repeat such a mood or such weather. If you change your poem the next day, it will be eclectic. So I try not to. Of course, sometimes that doesn't work. Not all lines, not all images, survive their season.

INTERVIEWER

Sometimes when you perform the same poem—a very famous poem like "Goya," say—over and over again, does it lose meaning for you? Or change meaning?

VOZNESENSKY

I never read "Goya" in Russia anymore. And I try not to read it here. Still, I think it brings me luck because it was the first poem I read in the West. And, yes, it does change. A

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poem like "Master Craftsmen"—the one with all the Russian bell sounds in it—changes even more. American bells aren't Russian bells. The readings at public performances are different than what are on the records. On stage, I'm another person, I do everything by instinct—maybe in Russia more than here, because here the program is more rigid. I'm always afraid to give a dead performance, to make a dead thing. In Russia, I never know what poem I'll read. Even here, I never know what mood I'll be in. Readings are irrational, instinctive, gut. They melt analysis and intellect from the printed poem. Not like when you read the page—then you have time for intellectual analysis.

INTERVIEWER

You say that audiences in Russia sometimes try to shift readings away from poetry. Into what? Into politics?

VOZNESENSKY

Whatever. The point is that a poetry reading is not a press conference.

INTERVIEWER

Have you had to field a lot of political questions on this American tour?

VOZNESENSKY

Not so much. Perhaps they've wanted to protect me. In any case, whatever I want to express politically, I express in my poetry. A poet can't give you opinions—he can only give you a way of thinking, a method. Isn't it more important to teach people how to think than tell them what to think? My poetry is complex, but I like to think that it is a key that opens up other questions: to sexual life, social life, political life. It's more important that I do *that* than that I answer, as a poet, specific political questions—like, say, should Sadat go to Israel. Certainly, I have my opinion about that as a man. But as a poet, we have only to give a key. A crystal of harmony.

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INTERVIEWER

Then you're saying that poetry is a way of training the mind?

VOZNESENSKY

If you want to change the world's spirit, I will go so far as to suggest that only poetry can do this. Many people think that everything is sold out today—politics, religion,—they see a world-wide bankruptcy. Once people believed that drugs would change the world, but your experiment with drugs is finished. People were destroyed. Very sad. I think the answer is in poetry. I am a believer.

INTERVIEWER

Are there moments when you're afraid you won't be able to write anymore?

VOZNESENSKY

Yes. I am afraid. Because I am full of Russian superstition. You have the same myths in your country: a poet writes only when he is young and sexy and he's got it all together. I'm afraid that one day it will stop coming, because for me it all depends on gut, on instinct. Yes, certainly I am afraid that one day I will stop like many poets long before my time. Where is wood? I want to knock on wood.

INTERVIEWER

But you had for yourself the example of Pasternak. You knew him when he was very old, and he didn't stop.

VOZNESENSKY

Pasternak was fantastic. He was a great poet. He stopped writing poetry because of Stalin. That was before the war—he said he didn't want to write any more poetry. But he couldn't say that openly. There's a story; I don't know all the details. The sense of the story is that after Stalin declared that Mayakovsky was the greatest Soviet poet of the age, Pasternak

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wrote Stalin a letter. This was a very dangerous thing to do, but Pasternak was careless about his safety. In his letter he said that if Stalin believed that Mayakovsky was the greatest poet of the age, that was very good; but he, Pasternak, would now drop a burden from his shoulders: the fate of Russian poetry. After that, he only did translations, the Shakespeare plays. And he refused to take part in his own anniversary celebrations. He refused all honors, everything. Pasternak never wrote any primitive, official poems, and yet he was not arrested. Perhaps it was because of that letter people say he wrote to Stalin. It was rumored that Stalin said that Pasternak was a holy fool and should be left alone. Then, during the war, it was as if Pasternak had been born again. He began to write great poetry, in a new style for him, very classical. I had first met him when I was a child, a boy of fourteen. Perhaps Pasternak's example helps me in my life.

INTERVIEWER

When you're not on tour, when you're at home, do you have a regular working schedule?

VOZNESENSKY

Never.

INTERVIEWER

You wait for it to happen?

VOZNESENSKY

I don't schedule. Nobody does. In Russia, everything is improvisation. Nobody can tell where he'll be on Friday night. Let me give you an example. When I came to America, I wanted very much to visit my dear friend Robert Lowell's grave. We drove out from Boston in the late afternoon—a dinner had been arranged for that evening. It was dark by the time we found the grave in the forest. I was with a young poet from Boston, and I said to him, "Please, I'm sorry, excuse me, it is impolite, but leave me alone, go to your car, I want

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half-an-hour alone." Then I began to write poetry. Later I asked him to find a phone and call the people and tell them we wouldn't come to dinner. They were all friends of Lowell's and they were very upset with me. But how could I have gone to a dinner party and broken the mood of that encounter? Even if I hadn't been writing a poem, I couldn't have gone to a party after that visit to his grave.

INTERVIEWER

In America, many poets earn their living by teaching. Are there a lot of Russian poets in universities?

VOZNESENSKY

No. Which is good and bad. It's possible for good poets to make a living as poets, but also for bad poets to go into it as a kind of business, for money. There are several thousand Russian poets living by their literature. It is too many—too many. I don't mean they're living well, but they're not teaching or doing anything else. We're paid by the line...

INTERVIEWER

As are American poets—at a rate that hasn't changed since the time of Edgar Allen Poe. We're overcrowded, too. *The Directory of American Poets* looks like the L.A. phonebook. There are more people claiming to be poets than there are buying books of poetry.

VOZNESENSKY

In Russia, the same problem. Poetry is as popular as rock music is here. Everybody writes poetry. Everybody wants to be a poet. It's frightening. It might be possible for a nation to have ten or twenty gifted poets. It might be possible to have a hundred. But several thousand? The mathematics are alarming. But I don't know. Maybe there will come a time on earth when everybody *can* write poetry. A genetic change. After all, we all carry the gene of poetry.

Quentin Vest
William Crawford Woods

A conversation between Andrei Voznesensky and Allen Ginsberg appears on page 149.

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Four Poems by John Koethe

A Refrain

Because we thought we had to know everything
About each other, only did already
Without realizing it, a sense of false
Expectation and foreboding, abstract and natural,
Began to alter the very look and sound and feel
Of what we said and did, earlier each day
Until now nothing but what confirms something
Someone knew or suspected all along is left for us,
And we stay where we are, in this place we have lived
For so many years, looking out the window at the water
And the city skyline in the distance. That is the refrain
Of a song that runs throughout the summer,
Of the girl sleeping in the sun and the face reflected in
the bus window,
The song of the neighborhood children,
Seeming like something that hasn't really started yet,
To be grasped and understood later, only to come alive
A little too late, after the others, the serious
Incautious ones, have given up or lost interest,
Weary of it all, and decided to go back home.
What kind of urge is it, anyway? Wanting simultaneously
To accept and penetrate these surfaces that exhaust the
human mind
Thirty-odd years later, but sickened and dismayed
By their indifference to everything we want them to be,
It returns us to ourselves as to the face in the cradle
Where the lullaby started that was to detain us for
The rest of our lives, constant through surface changes,
Its intensity varying as the world moves up or farther away
Or recedes to the verge of death. It is what keeps it alive
and waiting
For our own ends, meaning just as much as we meant it.

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Malignant Calm

These things left in your hands,
Part calculation, part the unguarded effects
Of casual introspection, hormonal swings,
The close weather we've been having lately,
Aren't less human for what they hide, for what they
Mean without, somehow, ever quite managing to say—
Only weird, and sometimes just a little bit hard to absorb.
The eye glances through them and moves along, restlessly
Like sunlight bouncing from wave to tiny wave,
Working the surface into an overall impression
Of serenity and mature reflection, a loose portrait
Of the face of early middle age. They are not meant
For anyone, yet reveal, like the tight corners of the mouth,
An intensity that overwhelms the things I wanted to say to you,
Blurring whatever it was that brought us together like this again,
Face to deflected face, shouting into the other as though it were a cave
And I drew my life from the echo of what I told you, from what you said to me.
Sometimes they even seem like enough, sufficient unto the day.

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The Guarded Optimist

I can't tell you much about it yet.
I can offer only these general impressions
Of captivity, of the self as a creation of captivity,
A creation of delayed speech. They're less messages
Than the products of a desire to be there with you again
Talking with you, and being apart with you again that way.
It isn't a feeling so much of being alone
As of having been here too long, locked in a trance
Of expectation after the other, awkward shapes had moved away.

What were they? I thought I saw the reflection of my face
In the window, but it was merely some of those objects I have become now,
Shrouded in a haze of personality like a perfume.
And if we could lose that, maybe it would return the sense
Of what all of this was like, with the blood roaring in the ears
Like the drone of something that used to live here
A long time ago, before you and I came to be.

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Picture of Little Letters

I think I like this room.
The curtains and the furniture aren't the same
Of course, but the light comes in the window as it used to
In the late morning, when the others had gone to work.
You can even shave in it. On the dresser with the mirror
Are a couple of the pictures we took one afternoon
Last May, walking down the alley in the late sunlight.
I remember now how we held hands for fifteen minutes

Afterwards. The words meander through the mirror
But I don't want them now, I don't want these
abbreviations.
What I want in poetry is a kind of abstract photography
Of the nerves, but what I like in photography
Is the poetry of literal pictures of the neighborhood.

The late afternoon sunlight is slanting through the window
Again, sketching the room in vague gestures of discontent
That roll off the mind, and then only seem to disappear.
What am I going to do now? And how am I going to sleep
tonight?

A peculiar name flickers in the mirror, and then disappears.

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Mark Schorr

Figures Implied in the Painting

For Elaine S.-R. and Morris R.

Realism means being there, not living some abstract
life tied up in equity against the possibility of
tomorrow, all the things we were taught to conserve.

Sometimes the choices presented to us allow room
to decide whether to paint ourselves into
the painting or not, but in any case we are

Strongly implied, if we paint at all. Only those who
bury their talent in the 'burbs and paint themselves
into the only corner of the Dinette World dinette

Are exempt from the above procedure; not implied in
the interior or anywhere but one bright Sunday
waking up to a naturalism of the brick house with

Overly comfortable chairs they cannot blow away.

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Judith Baumel

Fibonacci

Call it windfall

finding your calculation

come, finally,
to the last decimal point of pi.

In the silence of January snow
a lady bug survives the frost
and appears on the window pane.

She crawls a tiny space.
Hesitant. Reverses. Forward,
like a random-number generator,
the walking computer frog
who entertains mathematicians.

Think of the complexity
of temperature, quantification
of that elusive quality "heat."
Tonight, for instance,
your hands are colder than mine.
Someone could measure
more precisely than we
the nature of this relationship.

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Learn the particular strength
of the fibonacci series,
a balanced spiraling
outward of shapes,
those golden numbers
which describe dimensions
of seashells, rams' horns,
collections of petals
and generations of bees.
A formula to build
your house on,
that proportion most pleasing
to the human eye.

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Mark Rudman

The Man In The Room

after Rembrandt

That it could all come down
to a man in a room
empty but for

a ray of light
he resisted, seated
in a massive darkness

that was all shadow.
The walls were porous
but he never breathed.

He could have moved
into the light, been
for an instant

more visible than
the darkness threatening
to meld him with wood.

His skin cracked.
With all that
dust in the light

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he must have known
that outside
people were

on their way,
their feet raised
the dust off the street,

bringing it
into the light
where it was lost.

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Terry Stokes

Before Sleep

As you curl up
your smooth buttocks
lazy against my stomach
I am reminded of the pain, the cramps
& now, nothing
but your warmth unravelling my knots

& so I stroke you as the man who loves you
as the man who is frightened to death
as the man whose heart has been broken
by a wounded swan
& so I stroke you as a man in love
with the earth of your body

& what gets said has been said perhaps
& still I whisper & my breath gets wet
& this day begins to make sense
& I begin to haunt you as I hold you
like this

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The Gold Mountain Band

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Dick Barnes

On A Photograph Given Me By My Grandmother

The shadow of the photographer reaches over
almost to the wee tyke in a sombrero who listens
to the music these horny hardrock miners are making
with their oldtime instruments up here
in the lonely mountains: miners, and a few loggers,
and Ed Dolch who sold them groceries out of the cabin
that is behind them now, its unpeeled bark siding an
answer
to the late afternoon sun. This is the nineteenth century,
they all wear hats and suits—the cornet player
even wears a derby, tipped so the sun is in his eyes
as he stands at an angle to the others, his vanity or pride
still visible though the music has receded that gave it
a voice you could hear—only their boots
or rough shoes give away their occupation
and their location, in that more formal time.

From out of the picture to the photographer's right
another shadow converges toward his, the effect
of perspective being slightly exaggerated, evidently,
by a somewhat short focal length in the lens:
a man, wearing a hat like the others, but a backstander,
onlooker, mere listener, supposed not to be here
in this old photograph. Unoccupied and unexplained
(that's Ed Dolch with the trombone) he breaks
the crude symmetry the photographer is trying for,
this arc from drum to drum, the boy bisecting its chord,
with his shadow on the ground the photographer doesn't
see

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any more than he sees his own; his unaccomplishing
presence
commands our attention finally in a way the others do not,
the visible ones facing the sun. He does nothing but
doesn't
go away, participates vicariously, facing away from the light
as we do, just stands there, until I want to be shed of him,
make an effort of will, decide that it must be my shadow
(or yours, reader: I'm not wearing a hat), decide
he couldn't hear the music or racket that band was making
either.

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Two Poems by James Galvin

Sadness

Tonight in the Southwest
Sadness is disappearing

Tonight in splash-marks
On boulders

In the streambed
Sadness is disappearing

On mesas
In processions

Of miner's candles
Like Hohokam

Returning from the gulf
With salt

Tonight in the eyes
Of the oldest lion

Stirring our tracks
And in the heart

Of the cactus blossom
In the red spider

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Knitting wheels
Humming to herself

In a voice like transparent thread
Sadness is disappearing

The maidenly lizard
In her sandstone room

In the dim light of a quartz lamp
Makes love to her shadow

Sadness is disappearing
Tonight in the desert

Like a drop of blood
On the map of the Southwest

And above us
A few in the dark audience

Smoking cigarettes

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Not Lost But Gone

Lost veins
Of memory

Like Inca mines
Hide with God

The lean-witted
Aspen trees

Line the ravines
With gold

Babble whatever
The wind brings to mind

Follow the water
As far as it goes

They lead the way
Like forgotten events

Into disappearance
The leaves let go

In flurries
Of laughter

Not lost
But gone before

Like the fair-weather past
As it takes to the air

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Tom Disch

The Fugitive

For Judith Clute

Rectangularity controls the setting
Of tables, the organization of paint
On canvas, and the sport of ping-pong.
Once perpendiculars have been established
Various circular forms may be introduced:
Glasses, soup bowls, loops of color
Intended to suggest our own possible
Movements through more extensive spaces,
As when we drink, or sink into imaginary
Depths of Prussian blue, or hit the ball
Approaching us on its strict trajectory.
It is as inadvisable to violate
The basic postulate of confinement
In fiction as in those more obviously
Graphic arts. The grid of narrative
Is not the page on which the text
So interpretably rests, nor yet
the row of inky vocables that printers
String between two margins: it is a frame
Of mind, an imposition of the square
I-Think upon the blank I-Am.
As the linear narrative unreels,
As the words pale to transparence,
A world is formed complete with a table
Set for dinner of roast goose, fake
Hobbemas on the wall, and passionate
Ping-pong matches with death to the losers!

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From a world so circumscribed
A rational heroine might well wish
To escape, but all other novels are barred
To her by laws of narrative consistency.
Only in poems, and then for but a moment,
Can she hope to live unencumbered
By the walls of her novel. She inserts
The little key of poetry into the lock
Of the garden door, gives it a twist,
And in a twinkling she is out, amazed
At the rolling meadows, the meandering
Stream, the moon, the little teacups
Spinning end over end through the night sky.

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Three Stories
Paulé Barton

EMILIE PLEAD CHOOSE ONE EGG

Emilie was talking with Bélem while looking at the gathered loud of nesting birds. "Which bird going to hatch today's woe, guess that?" Emilie said, she said, "I'll carry that egg to the man who took my donkey for my debt, I'll give him that a breakfast gift!"

"The tax man?" Bélem said.

Emilie said, "That's it, you guessing good today," she said, "Now guess which egg woe is in."

Bélem said, "How can I guess? Look how many eggs out there look!"

"Got to make choices in this life," Emilie said, "Each morning a riddle to untie the knot of it, and then use that rope to tie up bad luck thinking to any tree here."

Bélem sang, "*Tie up bad luck thinking to a tree here, Fry that woe egg up for the debt man dear*," then he said, "That makes a good song!" he laughed then.

Emilie she said, "I'll sing it on the way over to his hut, I'll sing it to my donkey too. But now guess which egg!"

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But Bélem said, "I sigh. There's too many eggs out there! I tell you my eyes worrying over each one, they look the same all," he said more.

Emilie then, "Got to make a choice hurry! That debt man yawning toward his breakfast table hurry!" Emilie said.

"You asking me something hard here I tell you. You ask a very tight riddle knot, you talking a mystery under just one bird!" Bélem said.

"Got to make a choice! The debt man now sitting at the table now," Emilie said.

Bélem said, "It's like asking does water from the same well taste more better after carried in buckets to your thirsty mouth by a donkey or an ox, which one? It's like asking which of two sticks the same size to knock a lemon down with, which one?" he said.

Emilie said, "Make a choice my friend. You get to taste the drinking water in your throat whoever brings it anyway. You get to squeeze the lemon on your tongue whatever stick knocks it down anyway. That debt man choose my donkey instead my table and chair to take, yes he make that choice one over the other, you know this!"

Bélem said, "O.K. I say all the eggs got woe today's woe in them, how's that if I say that, there I say that!" he said.

Emilie said, "That's no choice, oh my that's no choice! Now the donkey and ox both spilling water, empty gone. Now the lemons shrivelling up to yellow lizard eyes on the trees, Now the debt man thinking greedy want of my table and chair. "Which egg will stop all this, friend?" Emilie plead him to choose one egg quick.

But Bélem could not choose, so Emilie hide her table and chair then. Emilie says, "All right Bélem friend, it's all right," she soothe that way.

Bélem he had a wound he felt then somewhere on him, but he couldn't find it. He said, "Emilie, I hurt on me somewhere, can you see the wound?"

Emilie said, "No," she covers the table and chair with fronds.

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Bélem he says, "The salt sea will find this wound on me, it always does when I swim in it, always clean my wound." But Emilie knew the wound of confusion and no-choice was too deep inside for the salt sea to sting it clean for Bélem right now.

THE BROOM IS BUSY

Boki was watching Ālse Odjo with a twig broom sweep the floor. The twig-ends were breaking off and Ālse Odjo kept sweeping them up. "You losing broom all over the floor!" Boki said, "I see that broom creating its own work!"

"Just like everyone on this island!" Ālse Odjo said back, "That's the island way," she didn't laugh, "This broom born and raised here, you know."

But Boki was not there just for talk, he was going with Ālse Odjo to the hut of old Boukinez that fortune teller woman that woman. They were going to bring two of her fortune guesses back to her. They went to turn two guesses back to Boukinez because no one before had bothered to walk guesses back, were they right or wrong the guesses and did she long to know what happened to them? They arrive at her hut. Boki says to her, "We are two guesses come back."

Boki says, "Do you remember me, I'm Boki?" she nods yes she does, "Remember you guessed for me a future dressed in fortune and laugh?" she nods yes again and says, "Yes, I wanted that to be true yes." Boki says, "Well, madam, I must honest tell you now I am poor on this island many years now, often in a dream clouds passing through my heart and are bread then, true as I tell it. So each morning I carry out my crate porch and sit on it trying to be happy I don't need to buy butter for that kind of breakfast bread no no!"

Boki says, "How did the world get this way can you say toward this?" he says to Boukinez.

She nods yes and no, then Ālse Odjo steps up, "And do you remember me, I'm Ālse Odjo?" Old Boukinez nods yes

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again, "You guessed I'd find a music to cure us all!" Boukinez is nodding. "Well, madam, I must tell you many years have passed through my flutes and they are tired, and all I can do is send my one goat to walk out clacking on the xylophone wood dock to try and cure us all, that funny goat, his one long spigot horn no good water pouring from it ever, and he got one short horn too! Tell me how did the world make him that way?"

All morning on her porch they talked her guesses, she remembered more of them from years gone by, and they kept saying to each other "How did the world do that?" End of morning they were all nodding alike, the goat watched this puzzled. And all along Ālse Odjo was sweeping the porch of old Boukinez, leaving twigs. Boukinez she closed her eyes to hear them roll by breeze over the porch floor. She was laughing inside herself because she knew later, after Boki and Ālse Odjo gone, she'd try to catch those twigs with her feet, staying in her chair.

THE WOE SHIRT

Bélem did tinker repair his bicycle by the stink-toe tree. Better to work there it smells so bad, work gets done no lazy quick. Then he rode to buy a woe shirt. He saw Mari then, standing. She said, "You going to buy that shirt, I know! You'll go buy that beggar shirt Bélem, I know. Oh it will cost you all your little money all your goats and old friend parrot to get it! I tell you clearly, look at what you do! Spend everything on a beggar shirt, no sense!" but Mari saw that Bélem felt the shirt on him already, too late, "O.K. then, say good-bye twice to your parrot," she said.

Bélem said, "Good-bye, I go begging, I'll have a woe shirt to beg in soon," twice he said this to his parrot. The parrot blink and green flutter the air and nibble fruit, said nothing back.

They walked the bicycle to the woe shirt closet set up in the

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market place, closet with all the market for a house around it. The shirt seller there looked at Bélem's tatter shirt, he said, "Take your choice."

Bélem looked at all the shirts then, and asked advice of Mari which to choose.

Mari said, "None," she said more, "Buy some thread and needle if you want to spend."

Bélem saw on the shirts memories he knew of things familiar. He said to Mari, "Look, there's that day on this shirt, that day we saw bark scrolling up on the eucalyptus trees!"

Mari saw that day sewn there, on the shirt, she said, "Yes, I remember," she looked squint and wary at the shirt seller looking away from her he was.

Bélem then, "And here, on this shirt, that night we saw the moon and moon-shaped cloud next to it. Out walking we were, and saw them."

Mari said, "Just like the eyes of the favorite goat of yours, lovely eyes next to each other like the moon and moon-shaped cloud, I remember. That goat stumble a lot, but those eyes. . .you could never sell that goat, no."

Bélem saw days past, all sewn on the shirts, he felt sad old and wanted all the shirts to wear on him those times over again.

Mari said, "Bélem, you remember good by forgetting bad, and the other way around, some memories spin your heart sad some happy," she said, "But when it stops you still standing here ready to buy this woe shirt, still! Buying these rich memories will be making you poor Bélem!" she knew how these things work.

Bélem was trying on the shirts.

Mari said, "You are stubborn for a shirt, Bélem friend. You don't look in your face well. It's a certain kind of fever for a shirt, you got this."

But Bélem did buy a shirt then, he bought his favorite shirt with Mari sewn on it sitting on a dock braiding garlic, practising for her daughter's hair, braiding. All this was sewn on the shirt and Bélem remembered it well. He bought this one.

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"That's a memory rich memory," he said, then went begging in the market.

Mari she turned back to see the shirt seller begin sewing fast, on a new shirt he sewed Bélem begging in the market, a picture of that he sewed. Mari stopped to look, he held the shirt up for her to look.

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Stéphane Mallarmé

A Tomb for Anatole

Anatole Mallarmé

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

On October 6, 1879 Mallarmé's only son, Anatole, died at the age of eight after a long illness. The disease, diagnosed as child's rheumatism, had slowly spread from limb to limb and eventually overtaken the boy's entire body. For several months Mallarmé and his wife had sat helplessly at Anatole's bedside as doctors tried various remedies and administered unsuccessful treatment. The boy was shuttled from the city to the country and then back to the city again. On August 22 Mallarmé wrote to his friend Henry Ronjon of "the struggle between life and death our poor little darling is going through. . . But the real pain is that this little being might vanish. I confess that it is too much for me; I cannot bring myself to face this idea."

The fragments that follow represent Mallarmé's efforts to write about Anatole's death. First published in 1961 in an edition scrupulously prepared by the French critic Jean-Pierre Richard (Pour un tombeau d'Anatole, *Editions du Seuil), they reveal a side of Mallarmé that is all but hidden in his finished works: the man of direct feeling. Or, more precisely, they reveal how the artistic preoccupations of this most hermetic and cerebral of poets originated in the emotional depths of personal experience. Having read them, one can no longer approach Mallarmé's finished work in quite the same way.*

These selections are culled from the 202 fragments presented in Richard's book. Although the pieces seem to resemble poems on the page, they should not be confused with poetry per se. They are notes towards a possible poem, sketches for a work that never came to be written. If, in spite of themselves, they carry the force of poetry, it is because they are the raw data of poetry, ur-texts of the poetic process. Beyond that, they stand as a rare example of utmost brevity wed to utmost feeling.

—Paul Auster

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1
child sprung from
the two of us—showing
us our ideal, the way
—ours! father
and mother who
sadly existing
survive him as
the two extremes—
badly coupled in him
and sundered
—from whence his death—o-
bliterating this little child "self"

3
sick in
springtime
dead in fall
—it is the sun

the wave
idea the cough

4
son
reabsorbed
not gone
it is he
—or his brother
myself
I told this
to him
two brothers

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6

did not know
mother, and son did
not know me!—
—image of myself
other than myself
borne off
in death!

7

what has taken refuge
your future in me
becomes my
purity through life
which I shall not
touch—

10

the supreme goal
was nothing
but to leave life
purely
you did this
in advance
by suffering
so much—sweet
child so that
It will weigh against
your lost life—your family
has bought the rest by their
suffering from having you
no longer

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11
to pray to the dead
(not for them)

———————

knees, child
knees—need
to have the child here
—his absence—knees
fall—and

———————

for one of the true dead
a child!

13-15
Pref.
dear one

—great heart
<tr> truly son of <who>
father whose
heart
beat for things
too vast
—and which came here
to fail
it was necessary—
inheriting this
marvelous fil-
ial intelligence, making

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it live again
—to construct
with his <clear>
lucidity—this
work—too
vast for me

and thus, (robbing
me of
life, sacri-
ficing it, if it

is not for the wk
—to be him grown up,
<robbed> of—and
to do this without
fear of *playing*
with his death—
since I
sacrificed my
life—since
I accepted as
my own this death
(cloistering)

16
example
we have known
through you this "better
part of ourselves"
which often
escapes us—and will be
within us—and our
acts, now

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child, planting
idealization

17
father and mother
vowing
to have no other
child
—grave dug by him
life ends here

18
vain
cures
abandoned
if nature
did not will it

I would take
myself for
dead

balms, only,
consolations for us
—doubt
then no! their reality

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37
time of the
empty room

---

until we
open it
perhaps all
follows from this
(morally)

39-40
you can, with your little
hands, drag me
into your grave—you
have the right—
—I
who follow you, I
let myself go—
—but if you
wish, the two
of us, let us make..

an alliance
a hymen, superb
—and the life
remaining in me
I will use for-----

and no mother
then?

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44-45

you look at me
I still cannot tell you
the truth
I do not dare, too little one
What has happened to you

———

one day I will
tell you
—as *man*
I do not want

———

you not to know
your fate

———

and man
dead child

46

no—nothing
to do with the great
deaths—etc.
—as long as we
go on living, he
lives—in us

———

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it will only be after our
death that he will be dead
—and the bells
of the Dead will toll for
him

49

sail—
navigates
river,
your life that
goes by, that flows

59

Setting sun
and wind
vanished gold, and
wind of *nothing*
that breathes
(here, the modern
? nothingness)

61-63

death—whispers softly
—I am no one—
I do not even know who I am
(for the dead do not
know they are
dead—, nor even that they
die

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—for children
at least
    —or

heroes—sudden
deaths

for otherwise
my beauty is
made *of last*
moments—
lucidity, beauty
face—of
what would be

me, without myself

———————

. . . . . .

76
family perfect
balance
    father son
    mother daughter
broken—
three, a void
among us,
    searching . . .

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79
no more life for
me

———————

and I feel
I am lying in the grave
beside you.

87
o earth—you do not
grow anything
—pointless—
—I who
honor you—

bouquets
vain beauty

104
what! enormous
death—terrible
death

———————

to strike down
so small a creature

———————

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I say to death coward

alas! it is within us
not without

122

(stop
earth—open ditch
never to be filled
—except by sky
—indifferent earth
grave
not flowers
bouquets, our
festivals and our life

128

mother identity
of dead life
father picks up
rhythm started here
of mother's
rocking
suspense—life
death
poetry—thought

161-162

Oh! you understand
that if I consent
to live—to seem

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to forget you—
it is to <so that>
feed my pain
—and so that this apparent
forgetfulness
    can spring forth more
horribly in tears, at

some random
moment, in
the middle of this
life, when you
appear to me.

183
true mourning in
  the apartment
—not cemetery—

    furniture

184
to find *only*
absence—
—in presence
of little clothes
—etc—
    mother.

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185

little sailor—
sailor suit
what!
—for an enormous
crossing
a wave will carry you
ascetic
sea,
<+ +>

190

no—I will not
give up
nothingness

———————

father---I
feel nothingness
invade me

Translated by Paul Auster

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Henry Grossman

Life Magazine *photograph taken at the 1967* Paris Review *Revel. From left to right Andrei Voznesensky, George Plimpton, and Allen Ginsberg.*

Andrei Voznesensky and Allen Ginsberg: A Conversation

These are fragments of a conversation held in New York City on December 28th, 1978. My friend Peter Orlovsky was also in attendance. This dialogue was taped at the Chelsea Hotel, walking 23rd Street to a coffee shop, in a taxi, up 6th Avenue, walking in the village...

Regarding the Modern Language Association, on one evening I participated in a reading of Hart Crane's poem, the

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Atlantis section of "The Bridge," before an assembly of American literature scholars. On the second evening, I was invited to read with other poets and asked Voznesensky to come up with Orlovsky and myself to demonstrate the oratorical style common to us, which was relatively unknown to the scholars.

Our conversation that week included some detailed accounts of the history of the attack and near-destruction of the American underground press by the F.B.I. The latter is the subject of a white paper I am writing for the PEN Club.

A.G.

Allen Ginsberg: You ever heard Hart Crane?

Andrei Voznesensky: No.

Peter Orlovsky: Oh, you've got a surprise coming.

Allen Ginsberg: He is a great oratorical poet. He committed suicide around 1932. Tomorrow I will be reading Crane.[1] You want to hear some? What this sounds like in English? This is very high, powerful. The howl in my style comes from the power—like Shelley. Very hard to understand, but you can decipher. It is about the Brooklyn Bridge, linking present to future. Science. Like your poem to the airport. His vision of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1920. A long poem, made of many parts.

Peter Orlovsky: Very condensed, and no fat.

Allen Ginsberg: I'll begin with just this small invocation to Brooklyn Bridge; then I'll read you the grand chorale at the end. It ends. . . big ecstasy. Begins:

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,

[1]At the MLA Convention, Hilton Hotel, NYC.

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Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
Over the chained bay waters Liberty—
(continues reading)

Andrei Voznesensky: Very good, very good.

Allen Ginsberg: This is where Robert Lowell got much of his iron. You know he has some iron-clang rhyme? Very beautiful parts on the railtracks with old bums. Big American panorama, like Kerouac, who loved him.

Peter Orlovsky: What is a "prayer of pariah?"

Allen Ginsberg: A pariah is like an outcast, a beggar. Prayer of pariah.

Andrei Voznesensky: Very good, yes.

Allen Ginsberg: But the great moment is the "Atlantis." I won't read it for sense, just for sounds. The pure rhythm sounds. It's like a Bach fugue. It rises, comes like this, rises again, comes like this and then comes. And then post-coitus, you know? After...

Through the bound cable strands, the arching path
Upward, veering with light...
(continues reading)

Andrei Voznesensky: Fantastic.

Allen Ginsberg: Great. Like Shelley. Like Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind."

Peter Orlovsky: What is "sidereal phallanx?"

Allen Ginsberg: Sidereal. The starry assemblies of the bridge. Very...somewhat technical language. "Kinetic of white choiring wings."

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Andrei Voznesensky: Very good.

Allen Ginsberg: It's mouthfuls. Of tremendous vowels, end, "Oh, Answerer of All!"... bom-bom-bom-da-pa-da!

Andrei Voznesensky: Very good, very good.

Allen Ginsberg: This was published in '33. This volume was given to me by William Burroughs in 1946. I've had it all these years. The poem was written, I think, in the late '20's. What year did Mayakovsky go to the Brooklyn Bridge?

Andrei Voznesensky: I think '29.

Allen Ginsberg: William Carlos Williams went to Greenwich Village, he told me, and he went to a reading of Mayakovsky's... a small hall, a few people, poets. But good poets, like Williams, the avant-garde. After it was over, Williams went up to Mayakovsky and said, "You laid an egg." Now in English it's funny. To lay an egg means to smell... bad thing. But what he meant with Mayakovsky was "You put something solid on the table." Laid an egg.

Peter Orlovsky: Something real. Something you could see.

Allen Ginsberg: That will grow, give birth. He laid an egg, he said. Williams told that story.

Andrei Voznesensky: But Mayakovsky did not understand it?

Allen Ginsberg: I think Williams said he was not sure; they had to translate it over and over again. Because it also means something terrible. Like a show "lays an egg." But Williams turned it upside-down.

Andrei Voznesensky: It was a small room, like for friends?

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Allen Ginsberg: In America there were no big poetry readings then. Except Vachel Lindsay. Do you know him? He tried to write syncopated jazz poetry. He wrote one about the blacks, called "The Congo," that goes:

Fat black bucks in the wine barrel room,
Barrel-house kings, with feet unstable,
Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table,
Pounded on the table,
Beat an empty barrel with the handle of a broom,
Hard as they were able,
Boom, boom, BOOM.
With a silk umbrella and the handle of a broom,

THEN I SAW THE CONGO, CREEPING THROUGH
THE BLACK,
CUTTING THROUGH THE FOREST WITH A
GOLDEN TRACK.
(continues reciting)

Peter Orlovsky: Kettle drums.

Allen Ginsberg: There is a recording of him. He was the first twentieth-century-on-the-road-bard. He wrote *Rhymes to be Traded for Bread.* Out on the road he'd offer to recite poems for a piece of pie. And he lectured like we do. Went to clubs. "The Chautauqua Circuit," in those days. It was a circuit of educated clubs. *(Voznesensky takes a phone call, speaking in Russian)*

Allen Ginsberg: Something terrible happened at the Academy.

Andrei Voznesensky: What?

Allen Ginsberg: I sent in the proposed names to, I guess the

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literary department. And they voted. When we got the final ballot yesterday: neither Burroughs nor Snyder was on it.

Andrei Voznesensky: Was Brodsky?

Allen Ginsberg: Brodsky was on it. John Hollander was on it. Many others, younger people, let us say, than Burroughs. Or Snyder. It's amazing. I can't imagine. Brodsky is all right. But Burroughs is like this vast international presence.

Andrei Voznesensky: Certainly.

Allen Ginsberg: So I was thinking of resigning, but I don't know. That won't cure ignorance either. What apparently happened is that the Battle of Anthologies, as they called it, between the academic poets, the university poets, and the open-form poets—post-Williams, post-Whitman—is continuing; there really continues to be a kind of establishment. I thought because I was in the Academy it didn't exist anymore. But to exclude Burroughs is scandalous, actually.

Peter Orlovsky: Gary Snyder, too.

Allen Ginsberg: And Gary Snyder, yes. The poets they chose may be worthy but they are not of equal power, or originality, or influence, or accomplishment.

Andrei Voznesensky: How many?

Allen Ginsberg: Well, they had eight poets, I think, that they could vote for. The expected ones were proposed and seconded by William Meredith, William Jay Smith, Richard Wilbur, with a few eccentrics proposed by Richard Eberhart or Muriel Rukeyser. And the totally eccentric proposed by me! So when that man said he thought I should resign, at that supper we had there, I thought, well, he's just talking drunk. But it probably represents the majority, for all I know.

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Peter Orlovsky: And they want you to resign?

Allen Ginsberg: Every year. Every time some of the old people die, the *alte kakers*—you know, the Yiddish phrase, old farts—the *alte kakers* elect some newer people, there is hope. Hollander is an old friend from Columbia, we went to school together. He wrote a terrible attack on *Howl* when it was put out, calling it a vulgar little book, but he's changed his mind. And he introduced me at Yale last year. What they must think of Burroughs I have no idea. They probably think he's some kind of outrageous madman.

Peter Orlovsky: Monster, monster.

Allen Ginsberg: It's just their own stupidity, or insensitivity or hatred. I'm supposed to be beatnik but I'm a member of the Academy! And it's almost a dishonor to be a member of an Academy where Burroughs, who is my teacher, is not a member. When I was young I read in stories of history about how great artists were neglected, and how the academies were always stupid. And I said, "When I grow up things will not be like that. If I am a member of an academy, I won't let these things happen." And now it is happening.

Andrei Voznesensky: One woman came to you and saw your black suit, your black very elegant coat and said, "Oh, how do you happen to be dressed like this?"

Allen Ginsberg: Well, when I was elected I always had dungarees and the day that I was installed I wore dungarees. But afterwards, I dressed up to be polite, to talk about Burroughs. It is a basic American problem. It's like plutonium, poisoning everybody through their ignorance. But how do you communicate with...people doomed to their ignorance. It's perplexing to know what to do in a situation like that. Do you have a similar situation in Russia?

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Andrei Voznesensky: No.

Allen Ginsberg: But then you must have geniuses that can't get in.

Andrei Voznesensky: In general, I think there are no geniuses.

Allen Ginsberg: Was Mandelstam a member of the Writer's Union when he was killed?

Andrei Voznesensky: No.

Peter Orlovsky: Who killed him?

Andrei Voznesensky: Stalin. Not Stalin personally but his camp-system. Mandelstam wrote a poem against Stalin, when he was in exile. After he returned from exile he wrote a poem *for* Stalin. After several years, they put him in jail but he was very weak, and he died in a hard labor camp.

Allen Ginsberg: How do people get elected to the Writer's Union in Russia?

Andrei Voznesensky: There are several steps. First, you have three recommendations. After, if you are a poet, you are elected by a poetry group in Moscow, Leningrad or some other place.

Allen Ginsberg: How long does that take?

Andrei Voznesensky: About a year, too long.

Allen Ginsberg: You can publish without being a member?

Andrei Voznesensky: Certainly, but it is impossible to be a member if you have not two or three books. You can publish

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and certainly not be a member. With one book they can invite you to come, or two books. But usually two or three is the minimum.

Allen Ginsberg: Are there any sort of intelligent writers that are not in, that are blackballed?

Andrei Voznesensky: Yes. Some of them now have been expelled. Some of them are now in emigration.

Allen Ginsberg: I've been getting headaches lately. Too much work. Too many hours over the desk, too many hours on the telephone, too many hours answering mail, running around to the Chelsea Hotel in taxi-cabs, going uptown tonight to the Modern Language Association meeting.

Andrei Voznesensky: What will be tonight?

Allen Ginsberg: Tonight will be very interesting. I'm not sure of the function, but the heads of the departments of English come together for a convention once a year. They have a president and they have committees. Part of it is a Hart Crane Association. They have a Hart Crane newsletter. Some scholarly work. But mostly it is a meat market for young Ph.D instructors trying to get jobs as professors. They go there hungrily, looking for their fate. To find a job teaching in Iowa or in Hartford or in some small college in South Carolina. It's a job market. So now, with inflation, there are too many teachers and Ph.Ds, and very few jobs. Everybody wants a good job. Otherwise, they'll have to go rob a bank or wash tables in cafeterias, mop, go on relief, sell gas, chop wood or go back to the forest. So they're all going to congregate there tonight and tomorrow, mainly looking for jobs. And tonight we're going to be the comic relief in this tragedy! We'll actually present some poetry.

Andrei Voznesensky: Do you like Elvis Presley?

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Allen Ginsberg: Not particularly.

Andrei Voznesensky: I was not a great admirer of his but when he died I said something important had died with him.

Allen Ginsberg: That was a little excessive. A little bit. Too much. It sounds like you are naïve and think he is the only originator. But actually, Presley imitated the blacks. He was the first white man to imitate the blacks.

Andrei Voznesensky: He was white or black?

Allen Ginsberg: White.

Andrei Voznesensky: No? All white? Not half-white?

Allen Ginsberg: No. That was his remarkable cultural contribution—that he was the first white man to sing like a black man, what was called in those days "R & B," rhythm-and-blues, southern style. He picked it up, with the physical gestures of the hips—fuck gestures of the hips—along with the sexuality attributed to the black soul singers, and he put black soul into a white body and white mouth and white words. The famous song, "You're Nothing But a Hound Dog," is basically black southern blues, rapping.

So he did break through. But then he was commercialized and capitalized on and used as a patriotic symbol. And finally...he took a lot of drugs and drank a lot. Finally, he was perhaps somewhat crazed. He walked to the White House in a cape.

Peter Orlovsky: In a purple cape.

Allen Ginsberg: And showed up at the gate and wanted to see Nixon. To lick Nixon's ass. To ask Nixon to give him a badge as a narcotics agent. He must have been paranoid. There's a famous photograph of him and Nixon standing

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there, Nixon presenting him with a narc's badge, promising that he could work with the police. Afterwards, he used to ride around with the police to bust people who were taking dope. But he himself, according to his autopsy, apparently was taking all kinds of dope, including, I believe, codeine, opiates and downers and uppers. That's what he died of, overdoses of too much. Ice cream and dope. And patriotism. So he had become somewhat of a hulk. He's known in Russia?

Andrei Voznesensky: Well, we know him more like a symbol. Because you needed more than his records, you needed to see him.

Allen Ginsberg: Well, the disks were good, too.

Andrei Voznesensky: Smile and tease.

Allen Ginsberg: That's the key. He sang black. He sang like a black. He had a great career. Then after the army he came out and made very dumb movies that were popular and made a lot of money. He sang less and improvised less. Finally, he was working for the Mafia in Las Vegas, that is to say the gambling night clubs in Las Vegas. Making millions of dollars. And very popular. But retired from the world. You read about his end? His last years?

Peter Orlovsky: He died in the bathroom. Going to take a shit.

Andrei Voznesensky: Heart attack?

Peter Orlovsky: I think it was a heart attack.

Allen Ginsberg: And congestion of all different drugs.

Peter Orlovsky: Malfunction of the kidney, or the liver. They

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found thirteen drugs in his blood; thirteen different kinds of drugs.

Allen Ginsberg: Medicines, prescribed by doctors: valium for sleeping, sleeping pills, some codeine, some opiates. I read in the newspaper a very interesting thing about drugs the other day. Remember Senator Joe McCarthy, the famous symbol? He was a morphine addict. He had an arrangement with Harry Anslinger, the head of the Treasury Department Narcotics Bureau, to get a prescription for illegal morphine, secretly. Anslinger tells about it in his book, but recently there's been a little exposé...that the name of the person was Joe McCarthy. So Joe McCarthy, the famous anti-communist, was actually a morphineomane.

Allen Ginsberg: You were not in the public eye when Stalin was alive, were you?

Andrei Voznesensky: No. Only Yevtushenko published. His first book.

Allen Ginsberg: Did Stalin and Yevtushenko meet...?

Andrei Voznesensky: No. Stalin was too big to meet a small poet. No. Yevtushenko was only beginning, and he was writing like everybody else then. At that time, everybody wrote about Stalin. Everybody wrote that he was a genius. It was a way of thinking. Really. I was a schoolboy. I didn't write because I was not a poet. I didn't write that Stalin is great. But I thought so...everybody said he was great, and that he saved our country during the war, that he saved the country before the war. He was the greatest revolutionary, and greatest friend of Lenin. I read all these things—all lies. I read them and I didn't know anything else.

Allen Ginsberg: When did you get the Fear?

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Andrei Voznesensky: Fear of what?

Allen Ginsberg: Capital F. When did the change come over you?

Andrei Voznesensky: Oh, very late. After his death.

Peter Orlovsky: What year was that?

Andrei Voznesensky: In '53; I was 20.

Allen Ginsberg: How did you begin to learn that the historical truth you'd learned at school was...

Andrei Voznesensky: Oh, I...in the university, from the Khrushchev reports, and when people returned from the labor camps and they started talking. *(telephone conversation)*

Allen Ginsberg: We were sitting with a painter, Russian-born, Raphael Soyer, and we said we were seeing you. I gave him "Nostalgia for the Present" and he had a book of Yevtushenko. He's very old, seventy-nine. So I asked him what he thought. He had some criticism. You want to hear?

Andrei Voznesensky: Does he understand Russian?

Allen Ginsberg: He reads Russian. He said he liked Yevtushenko. Said he was plain, straight-forward. He thought you were equal. But he said he thought you flirted too much. You know flirt?

Andrei Voznesensky: Yeah. Too public?

Allen Ginsberg: With "ideas," or "Modernity," or beatnik ...you know the "Mode," flirted. It was very interesting from an old man, seventy-nine.

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Andrei Voznesensky: He's a painter?

Peter Orlovsky: For sixty years.

Andrei Voznesensky: He's a very good painter?

Allen Ginsberg: Very good, but not modern. You know the Ashcan school? George Bellows. He ascends from that. Very good portraits. Too bad we didn't go there together—maybe get our portrait painted. Classic style. Old-fashioned classic, but very, very good. He does not like Jasper Johns or Robert Rauschenberg or Kandinsky. Who else didn't he like? He didn't even like Cézanne! No, he likes Cézanne's subject matter.

Andrei Voznesensky: I think, for him, my language and way of thinking is not understandable because Russia has changed. But he doesn't understand the change and he thinks I am playing the clown. Yevtushenko is certainly good, but for an old man he is easier to understand.

Allen Ginsberg: I think that's what Soyer likes. Because it was so down, so grounded, or so plain . . . the Russia he knows.

Andrei Voznesensky: In my poetry he misses the language and grammar of his time.

Allen Ginsberg: It was interesting to hear an old man say that. It was the only time I've heard anybody give criticism of you that I thought, that's interesting, maybe to think about and tell you. People criticize me a lot. Why are you always doing this about politics, why drugs, why punk rock? Why non-poetic exhibiting? And I take it to heart.

Andrei Voznesensky: Did this ever embarrass you, this criticism . . .

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Allen Ginsberg: I take it seriously. I get angry sometimes. Once there was a critic [A. Alvarez] in England, very formalist, I forget his name, a friend of Sylvia Plath's, who reviewed "Kaddish" in the 1961 London Times Literary Supplement, and denounced it as being a fake poem and terrible. Insincere. Bad writing. Beatnik. It belonged to psychiatry, not to poetry. I got so angry, one of the very few times—maybe five times—I wrote the critic a letter, privately, saying, I forbid you ever to write about my work again, you're an evil creep, you're a nut. But then I regretted writing, because I was just angry. And his judgment later proved, among his peers, like Robert Lowell, to be so erroneous! And then he himself later began writing about suicide poetry! With Sylvia Plath. And got all entangled in that area that he was denouncing to me.

(following a discussion about where to eat)
Allen Ginsberg: So the key in American poetry that I got from Kerouac and that he got from Lucien Carr, was this pronunciation of the *tones* of key words in sentences. That comes somewhat from the exaggerated style of barroom conversation among newspaper reporters. Do you have that tradition in Russia? That journalists drink a lot?

Andrei Voznesensky: Oh yes.

Allen Ginsberg: Well, everybody drinks a lot. The American myth is that newspaper men, in their bars, drink all the time. Which is partly true.

Andrei Voznesensky: Because they travel a lot and meet new friends and. . .

Allen Ginsberg: And there's a peculiarly aggressive, cynical quality to their conversation. So you get that rhythmic run of ba-ba-b-B̄A-B̄A-ba. "Well, *you say* you heard that, but I don't believe that." "*You say* you saw that guy murder that

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guy but I don't believe it." "*You say* you're innocent but I don't believe it." So you get a Da-DA-da-da-da. So that actually provides a set of vocal tones which can be applied to emphasize the meaning of any sentence.

Like a sentence, a simple sentence: "I just gave him *the key*." "ta-ta-ta-TA-TA."

Ezra Pound has very interesting advice for poets: to "follow the tone leading of the vowels"—a, e, i, o, u. The open sounds in English. To follow the *tone* leading of the vowels.

Andrei Voznesensky: Fantastic. Very good.

Allen Ginsberg: To be conscious of that. He inherited his consciousness from his study of Greek meters. Because in Greek they also had tones measured. Part of Greek meter was pitch or tone.

Andrei Voznesensky: Yes, I know that.

Allen Ginsberg: So part of their measure of the line was perhaps a line with three high tones, two low tones. I don't know Greek meter. But since Pound, many American poets have been conscious of the tones, as well as the rhythm, in stress—da, da, da, da-da. As well as the length of the vowel. And Pound measures his poetry in length of vowel, I think we talked about this one time.

Andrei Voznesensky: In a plane. I remember this conversation. We were going to Boston I think?

Allen Ginsberg: Yes.

Andrei Voznesensky: You didn't tell me about your reading in a cafe and singing in Boston [at Passim's Coffee House].

Allen Ginsberg: I lost my voice. Friday night all the lights in

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Harvard went out, and so no more sound system. I was singing with Peter and with a guitar; so we moved the stage to the steps. . . because there was one light on the steps, sort of an emergency light, and did it without loudspeaker, singing. My voice is still a little rough from that. Otherwise it's good. Business was not so good because many, many snowflakes fell that weekend. But it was enough to pay our way and make money and pay for the. . . actually $2000 for four nights, two shows. A lot of work. But intimate and fun.

Andrei Voznesensky: Tell me, Harvard students are not the same as in the whole United States?

Allen Ginsberg: Well, they're the same except the environment is different and they realize their environment is elite.

(On a walk through the Village, following Voznesensky reading)
Allen Ginsberg: Cunt will always get you confused. You must never let cunt come before art! Or cock! That's why I try to arrange to read earlier. In big readings I always, often, get put last. And by that time everybody is strained and tired and has headaches and wants to go to the bathroom and want to eat, is hungry. So this time I said, well, maybe we go second.

Andrei Voznesensky: Are the love odes typical for you? You read in a very intimate and touching way.

Allen Ginsberg: I have four poems that style. Different affairs. From now on, every affair I will write poems about. . . new adventures. New adventures in the heart.

Peter Orlovsky: He has not read his S&M poem yet, how he likes to be spanked!

Allen Ginsberg: I thought "Punk Rock"—to wake them up.

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Then, once woken, to bring them serious, from heart love poems, then some intellectual stuff, with that "Fake Saint" and then . . . What I can't understand is, how, after all these years, there are still poets who read with that sing-song, a dying fall they call it. "Momma, why don't you give me your . . ."—reading different poems with the same tone, as if there were no different emotion, no different situation.

Andrei Voznesensky: Yeah. Nothing happened.

Allen Ginsberg: The text was not bad . . . the young man's. [at the MLA reading] Good things . . . "cows knee-deep in muck by the barn." Clear. But he said it flat-voiced: "cows-knee-deep-in-muck-by-the-barn."

Andrei Voznesensky: Very sentimental.

Allen Ginsberg: Just one voice-tone.

Peter Orlovsky: Fragile.

Allen Ginsberg: Fragile, sentimental. It is the old tradition of the artificial.

Andrei Voznesensky: And impossible to understand where a poem is finished. He wanted to take his handkerchief out . . .

Allen Ginsberg: You have the same thing in Russia?

Andrei Voznesensky: Yes.

Allen Ginsberg: What is the old-fashioned style in Russia?

Andrei Voznesensky: The same. Very simple.

Allen Ginsberg: But they have the tradition of chants.

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Andrei Voznesensky: Tradition. . . Mayakovsky was one. But there are a thousand poets in other style.

Peter Orlovsky: My father said there was a poet in Russia who dressed up like a cat and recited his poems. Do you know his name?

Andrei Voznesensky: No. It's not important, I think. There is one now who wears a mask, a black mask. He was in the war and was blinded. And he's very popular because he was a hero and there is an aura of mystery about him. Very romantic, when he came with velvet black mask, and girls leaping.

Allen Ginsberg: But are there imitators of Mayakovsky and Yesenin who shout their poetry?

Andrei Voznesensky: A lot like Mayakovsky. Mayakovsky was very sincere.

(in restaurant)
Allen Ginsberg: You had a good object lesson tonight.

Andrei Voznesensky: What for?

Allen Ginsberg: To see the two styles. You see American poetry was not involved with vocalization.

Andrei Voznesensky: You are like from another planet. They are from another planet. But you are full of blood. . . .

Peter Orlovsky: When did you first start booming our your voice?

Andrei Voznesensky: I guess from the beginning. From the beginning. '58. I think it was because I was so shy.

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Allen Ginsberg: Did your voice change over the years?

Andrei Voznesensky: Yes, very much. Because I had a very high voice; a young voice. And a slightly different style, not like now. Not childish but boyish.

Allen Ginsberg: When did it begin changing?

Andrei Voznesensky: I think maybe...around the time I came to the States.

Allen Ginsberg: When you came to the States?

Andrei Voznesensky: Not because of the trip but because something had changed inside me. It was after a terrible period in my life and my poetry. Before, I had been more naïve and lyrical and romantic. It's very strange to hear the records I made in those days.

Allen Ginsberg: From 1963 my voice went down, lower, lower, lower, from mantra chanting, Hare Krishna, OM... AH...HŪṂ...

Andrei Voznesensky: Did you read your "Plutonian Ode" in another style before?

Allen Ginsberg: Every time different. The times you heard me I read it in a loud voice. Then I lost my voice in Cambridge, like I told you...the loudspeaker failed, so I shouted.

Andrei Voznesensky: That happens in the United States.

Allen Ginsberg: All the time. One day there was a giant blackout all over the Eastern seaboard. Remember? So I began to read "Plutonian Ode" very personally. Without shouting. And I realized that I had been shouting too much.

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Using too much aggression. And that the poetry was strong enough that it could be delivered more in ordinary speech-voice.

Andrei Voznesensky: But today it was addressed to everyone personally. Each person.

Allen Ginsberg: That was because I was ashamed of the way I had read it before in front of you—too loud, not sensitive enough. Also because Robert Cordier was there and he never heard it. He had translated my poetry into French, and didn't know that I had written a big poem this year. Also because some of the poets there I knew, and some of the teachers. I was hoping to communicate. You know, if you have a lover in the audience...

Andrei Voznesensky: Oh yes, you read better.

Allen Ginsberg: Then you've had that experience?

Andrei Voznesensky: Certainly.

Allen Ginsberg: Peter's quality of voice is amazing. He is one of the few poets who could read in a railroad station or in a factory and be heard. Like a farmer's voice calling hogs!

Andrei Voznesensky: But how they understand you? Did they like you, these farmers, when you read to them?

Peter Orlovsky: No, he said I could read...well, when I'm out in the farm fields, making a garden, planting trees, I sing a lot. Sing all day long. I sing for two days, non-stop. And I sing very loud. I yodel very loud. So it builds up the strength of the voice. And then there are herbs to make your voice strong. Licorice.

Andrei Voznesensky: What kind of songs?

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Peter Orlovsky: Songs about birds, green grass, living to be 118, soil, tasting the soil, good soil, poor soil. Different colored plants—some light green, some dark green. Anything that comes into my head. As fast as it comes into my head, I sing it out.

Allen Ginsberg: Who else in Russia has not a strong voice but a real voice? From heart?

Andrei Voznesensky: Have you heard Bella Akhmadulina?

Allen Ginsberg: Very bell-like.

Andrei Voznesensky: Yes. Everybody has his own style, Martynov has his own, Bella her own.

Peter Orlovsky: How old is Bella?

Andrei Voznesensky: She was born in 1937. She is forty. I think forty.

Allen Ginsberg: I learned from Bob Dylan. A singer. He completely becomes one with the wind coming from his body. And bends the wind a lot. Long breath.

Andrei Voznesensky: How is his poetry now?

Allen Ginsberg: Better. Better and better. More realistic. More disillusioned. He said, talking about art, that what he wants to do is to stop time. To be so intensely in the moment that he stops time. And he also said, quoting Henry Miller, "the artist innoculates the society with his disillusionment."

Andrei Voznesensky: Fantastic.

Allen Ginsberg: No illusion. Just sees straight reality.

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Andrei Voznesensky: Very good.

Allen Ginsberg: Kerouac said if Russia and America ever went to war, he'd commit suicide. Because Kerouac read all Dostoevsky and he wept for the Russian soil.

Peter Orlovsky: He said he'd get up in the trees and shoot the Reds.

Allen Ginsberg: No, that was later, when he was drunk, he was talking about the Chinese Reds, Mao. But earlier, I said what if we live long enough to see Russia and America get into war? He said, "Oh, I'd commit suicide. That would be the end of everything." Very sweet then. That was 1960.

Andrei Voznesensky: Where is Burroughs?

Allen Ginsberg: Burroughs? He went back to Boulder. He has a little apartment and one telephone. And his telephone rings in New York, but he is out there in Colorado. And his secretary or somebody answers it in New York. And he works all the time, writing. Everyday he gets up at eight o'clock, he writes for two or three hours, takes a walk, comes home. He has finished one great, huge long novel in the last five years, including work from ten years ago.

Peter Orlovsky: 500 pages.

Allen Ginsberg: "Cities of the Red Night." His magnum opus—big work—of the 70's, maybe his greatest work, is about a world plague. It's like an invasion of a virus, maybe from outer space, maybe launched by the KGB-CIA. And a characteristic of the plague is that all the citizens buttocks and loins and genitals turn bright red like a bikini, and they get sexually aroused into frenzy and they die in orgasms. But they contaminate each other and they die spurting semen all over, attacking and raping everybody. And the only people

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exempt from the plague are the ex-junkies, the junkies and heroin addicts—because perhaps the heroin has subdued their sexual appetite and made them disillusioned. So the police and the army are all opiomanes and the army is paid with heroin and with opium. They get very sentimental with each other about being in the army, and very patriotic. The conversations between the old sergeant and the private are, "Sarge, could you give me a little extra pay for the weekend? I want to go out for the weekend; I need a little extra fix."

Andrei Voznesensky: Are they very weak?

Allen Ginsberg: Actually, no. It's like Chinese rickshaw drivers. They go on the nod sometimes.

Andrei Voznesensky: But tell me, what is in fashion now? Is it cocaine?

Allen Ginsberg: What is it now? The rich people take cocaine, maybe the Rockefellers. It is more and more in vogue. Because it makes you feel brilliant. Have you ever tried it?

Andrei Voznesensky: No.

Allen Ginsberg: No? I've had cocaine lots. It's like amphetamines, Benzedrine, you know? Uppers...

Andrei Voznesensky: Yeah, yeah.

Allen Ginsberg: It gives you a feeling of great power, magnanimity.

Peter Orlovsky: White light in your brain, sexual extra power, extra thrill.

Allen Ginsberg: Also vocal, also intellectual. The sounds you

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hear echo and rebound from the ceiling. So sensitive. But also puts you in this egomaniac, big universe of your own.

Peter Orlovsky: You're the only one in the world.

Allen Ginsberg: I was with Dylan years ago on tour, and there was a lot of white powder around. So he said, You've got to come with us for the rest of the tour and we'll go around the world forever, singing, I'm a minstrel. I said, My father is dying, I have to go home, I've got to go home for a month or two, take care of my father. He said, Bring your father! I said, What about me, when I'm dying. He said, We'll take care of you when you're dying. But then the next morning he was glum and he didn't remember, or we didn't talk about it. And I'd gone up to my room, thinking he was going to take care of me for the rest of my life! I didn't realize that his munificence was engorged with snow. You know the word "snow"?

Andrei Voznesensky: No.

Allen Ginsberg: Snow is the slang for cocaine. Snow.

Andrei Voznesensky: Oh yes, I know.

Allen Ginsberg: I remember in Paris I had a lot of cocaine. And I stayed up one whole night thinking, I'm going to write a great prose work. And I typed all night. And at the end it was this prose work about beating up a slave, a sexual slave!

Peter Orlovsky: Gives you an octopus mind. Your mind goes in many directions all at once.

Allen Ginsberg: Really anti-social. It is not for organic community. So that on the rock-and-roll tour where we were, at the beginning, it was family and friends and community, but then when the cocaine entered, everybody went off into their

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own rooms to brood over their destiny.

Peter Orlovsky: Didn't talk much.

Allen Ginsberg: Everybody became Napoleon.

Peter Orlovsky: Stopped talking in the hallways and the buses. They became quiet.

Allen Ginsberg: Everybody became paranoiac Napoleons.

Andrei Voznesensky: Not aggressive?

Allen Ginsberg: Yeah, some aggression comes out.

Peter Orlovsky: Some of them broke mirrors on walls. Got drunk, broke mirrors.

Allen Ginsberg: It's not bad, for fun. But then some people think maybe it's real power. It's a power drug.

Peter Orlovsky: Too much, no good. Once...

Allen Ginsberg: Try it some time.

Peter Orlovsky: Once in a while it's all right.

Allen Ginsberg: What happened to you when I gave you that STP pill?

Andrei Voznesensky: I don't remember.

Allen Ginsberg: You took it? I made the mistake, I got to confess to you, I had never tried it and I gave it to you. I told you before. Peter took it.

Andrei Voznesensky: What happens with STP?

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Peter Orlovsky: I was crawling on the floor, near the radiator, and I saw a spark, a blue spark fly from the radiator. And a very brilliant light, bright light, colors. Got very excited. And I think I fell asleep. And I shit in my pants!

Allen Ginsberg: And what happened to you? I gave it to you by mistake, thinking it was LSD and thinking I was going to influence the course of Russian poetry.

Andrei Voznesensky: It was in The Chelsea.

Allen Ginsberg: I thought you took it back to Russia and took it.

Andrei Voznesensky: No, no, no. In The Chelsea. After you left me. It was the first and last time.

Peter Orlovsky: What year?

Andrei Voznesensky: I don't remember what year!

Allen Ginsberg: Destroyed your brain?

Andrei Voznesensky: No, no, no. It was '67. And something happened, I think, with my memory for about five days. Because I remember the beginning of this, but I don't remember what happened. I am told that I didn't eat for, I think, two days. Is that possible?

Allen Ginsberg: That was one of the worst things I've ever done. Ignorance. Ambitious.

Peter Orlovsky: We have some good LSD.

Andrei Voznesensky: I am afraid; I am very afraid for my brain.

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Peter Orlovsky: We all take it together. We go out in the country, with a little meditation, get nice, bright colors.

Allen Ginsberg: LSD is much milder than STP. LSD, you don't get a habit. Well, some young people think they are going to chase God down to the end of eternity, so they take it every day. But Gregory Corso says that "LSD shows you more of what isn't there." You see your own projections. If you think a cloud looks like the face of Rembrandt, then, after a while, the idea solidifies and you start pointing it out to other people. They can't see it and they think you're crazy.

Peter Orlovsky: My father told me in Siberia they used to take Siberian mushrooms; the monks and the head monk would eat the mushrooms because there was a scarcity of mushrooms and the lower monks would drink the urine of the head monk. They would pass on the urine cup.

Allen Ginsberg: I have a big book at home, all about it, with all the anthropological documents. By Gordon Wassen. In English and French. There are many studies of it.

Andrei Voznesensky: I've never read about it.

Allen Ginsberg: The urine passes through the body and can be recycled. In Central Siberia there are many stories of the shamans using that.

Peter Orlovsky: Morarji Desai, the Prime Minister of India, drinks one glass, eight ounces, of his urine every morning.

Allen Ginsberg: His own or cow's urine?

Peter Orlovsky: His own urine. Because he said, in *Time* Magazine, in the People section, it makes him feel good every day.

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Allen Ginsberg: It's an old Indian tradition. Peter was drinking his piss the other day.

Peter Orlovsky: But not every day, no.

Allen Ginsberg: Experimenting.

Andrei Voznesensky: One of our poets had a name, "Uran." Not a bad poet. But for him his name sounded too atomic, too modern. He has changed his name to "Urine." He thinks it sounds better.

(seeing Empire State building in distance)
Allen Ginsberg: Empire State—red, pink and green for Christmas. Do they light up buildings in Moscow?

Andrei Voznesensky: No, not with colored lights. White. In my building they do. I live in a skyscraper. Very fine light. You know, Moscow's a lot cleaner. Very clean, very clean city.

Allen Ginsberg: Washington, San Francisco, everywhere. Denver is terrible, Denver is the second worst, Los Angeles is up front.

Andrei Voznesensky: But I was in Los Angeles and did not notice.

Allen Ginsberg: But when you come down, in a plane, you notice this color, that haze—you know what color that is? Brown. What does it look like? Shit brown.

Andrei Voznesensky: Yeah, shit brown.

Allen Ginsberg: Shit smear. Because it is the shit of the cities, the gas, the fart of the cities.

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Going To Sicily

Helen Barolini

The trip was going to be a *stronzo*. It was reminding her of a Rome traffic jam once near Ponte Vittorio when a man in sun-glasses and an open shirt had gotten out of his blocked Fiat 500 and, from all the hundreds of jammed cars to choose from, had directed his clenched fist at her, screaming, *"Stronzo!"*

Connie had told Giorgio about it that night.

"Do you know why he chose me in all that mess to call a shit?" she said.

"No, why," Giorgio had asked, idly attentive, getting out of bed to find an ashtray.

"Because he was an elephant!" said Connie.

"Now what do you mean?" Giorgio's forehead had creased with impatience.

"That guy was like the elephant they use in log-jams in India or somewhere to pick the one log out of thousands that has to be removed to unblock the jam. But I didn't realize it until after. If I had caught on in time, I would have taken the whole thing differently."

"What would you have done differently?" he had asked, back in bed with her, smoking, more interested now.

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"Instead of just sitting there, or giving him horns, I'd have waved and said, *grazie*. It was a kind of satori between us. You see what I mean?"

"It sounds like the same kind of rationalization that analysis leads to," Giorgio had said. For he was a physicist, full of a logic that she never knew what to do with—that meant he didn't take her seriously.

And now this trip: a *stronzo* and she needed no divining elephant to tell her so. She stood at the rail of the boat watching the lights of Naples recede. Tomorrow morning they'd be in Palermo where they'd rent a car to drive to the Sicilian poet's villa for the interview. By Monday back in Rome for the evening classes at the Centro where she taught English to Italian businessmen and students like Giorgio.

The trip had been worked out through Giorgio's connections. Someone had been able to secure them an appointment with the poet in Sicily who was a recluse as well as a celebrity. The idea was that Connie would do an article which, together with Giorgio's photos of the illustrious freak in his lonely villa, they'd sell to some big-paying American magazine.

The trip had a meaning in the beginning: they'd use the money they got to find a flat in which to be together. As Giorgio put it, they couldn't marry yet, he was still studying; but they were serious fiancés. They met now in her big, heatless, bathless slum apartment off Campo de' Fiori whose rooms she sublet to three, or four, or half-a-dozen others, depending on her finances at the moment. Giorgio lived at home, the twenty-six year old child of doting Italian parents *per bene*. And Connie?—past thirty, American, a hanger-around Rome for years teaching, dubbing, translating, writing, subletting, living, waiting.

Giorgio leaned over the ship rail and a line of the Sicilian poet's came to her mind: "but if the fleeting is dismay/eternity is terror...."

There it was: their relationship—another one in her curriculum vitae—was destined to be fleeting. She woke at night,

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sometimes, sad at Giorgio's not being there. He had never spent a whole night with her for his mother would have gotten anxious and begun to worry the father who had a bad heart. Giorgio said it was natural his mother worried and waited up for him. Connie said nothing.

They met after class in her place and after making love against the background commotion of her tenants, they went out to eat in one of the nearby *trattorie*. She missed the idea of waking with Giorgio next to her and seeing him shave in the morning while she took a bath—finally, in their own home, with hot water and no boarders.

She scorned this square part of herself that was no part of the scene anymore. But what could she do? She loved him. Enough for a lifetime?—for that eternity the poet called terror? For having children and growing old and bored together? With Giorgio who was still his mother's child?

Giorgio, with irony, called her Signora de Staël, referring to the casual hospitality she offered the artistic and intellectual transients who either rented or visited her place. Electronic composers, sculptors, starlets, poets, pushers, fags, Fulbrighters and method actors made Connie's rooms the freak-out of a French salon.

Connie was an innocent, a flower-child before they had sprouted, the pourer at a perpetual Mad Hatter's tea party in a falling apart palazzo. She was attractive in a floozy, tartish way and she liked to recall that in her first Rome years she had had as student (and lover) a now rather well-known actor who would have been the father of her child if she hadn't gotten an abortion. She still read of his life and loves in the magazines at the hairdresser's. His first literary woman, he had told her then in those days before he made it and she was still under the illusion that teaching was only temporary, that she was going to be a writer as soon as she got down to it—which meant getting enough sleep at night, having her old Olivetti portable repaired, and eating a non-Italian breakfast in the morning so that she'd have the strength to think. Somewhere, in one of the fourteen rooms of her place there was a

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copy of the American magazine which had printed her poem to Giordano Bruno. His statue stood in the middle of the market square and it was his backside she saluted each morning when she went to the latrine on the balcony.

When it became clear she wouldn't be a writer, she settled for interesting vacations. One year, dressed in cowboy boots and a Scotch plaid cape and wearing the *cache-sexe* given her by a former student, she went to Tunisia with a Japanese painter named Yuki. They took a guitar along hoping to fill it with hash. But somewhere near salted-over Carthage, they quarreled. She returned alone to Rome and threw his stored canvases into Campo de' Fiori where the market people found them the next morning and sold them from their stands along with the eels and broccoletti.

Connie (short for Concetta, for she was Italian-American) painted in her spare time while listening to French conversation records. Each winter she came down with a succession of colds which cost her thousands of lire in Kleenex and made her painfully aware of her American-reared frame which, after years in Rome still asserted its imperative: a longing for central heating and hot water.

Connie's famous gaucheries were never malicious, but sprang from unquenchable ingenuousness. In her innocence she had had two very similar experiences regarding hands which convinced her that the lottery numbers corresponding to hands would someday have to come up for her. The numbers were two and eleven, but since the incident had happened twice, she added two two's to the one's of the eleven and got what she felt must be her true number, thirty-three. Her age. Dante's.

The incidents were these: once in her class, in the usual bantering way which she found put her Italian pupils at their ease and helped them speak more freely, she had singled out a young man with a "And who are you?—Napoleon, with your hand in your jacket that way?" only to have him withdraw a stunted arm and withered claw from concealment.

The other time, at home, she had called out from the far

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end of the corridor to a friend at the door whom she hadn't seen for a long while, "Aha, so you've come back to me—and empty handed!" And he, one chance in a million, held up a bandaged stump and said, "Yes, the four fingers are lost but maybe the thumb can be saved."

So when is there an end to innocence—after how much clumsiness, after how many abortions, how many trips to Tunisia and back?

Connie looked out at the dark sea and considered. Her life was like her home: a patchwork, a flimsy arrangement, a passing parade of beats and bohemians to whom she could not anchor. But could she commit herself (like being frozen forever in a photo) to marriage or work, or whatever, before she first knew how to define herself, who she was? She couldn't. And that was why, she concluded, no one—certainly not Giorgio—took her seriously.

He came over and stood next to her at the railing. "What are you thinking about?" Even in lovemaking that's how it would be: What are you thinking of, he'd say . . . that you're as beautiful as the sun . . . besides that? . . . that I'm afraid to lose you . . . *Stupida!* In two, three, five years we'll remember what you said and laugh about it.

Really? Where would they be in five years? He in Parioli with an Italian wife and an important job. But Connie?

Still they were persisting in the illusion of a future together. With this trip they could make thousands of dollars if they were lucky. Why not? A few such pieces and they'd be set up forever. Forever? *L'eterno è terrore.*

Cosa nostra they called themselves going to Sicily and doing their thing together. Giorgio was always saying, "We go well together." He liked being with her because she was amusing and pretty and a good sport, not as demanding as Italian women. He liked the way she, American, spoke Italian. It made him tender towards her, he told her. And she liked being American in Italy. It made her in turn tender towards her lousy childhood in Chicago where he had only been a wop.

January. It was a strange time of year to be going to Sicily.

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There were, in fact, no tourists on the boat for the overnight trip to Palermo. Just Neopolitans or Sicilians chatting and eating. At dinner she and Giorgio sat at a table with a complaining woman who force-fed her two apathetic, sallow-faced children with little squeals of *Mangiate! Mangiate!* It made Connie a little sick. Straight Italianism, not the movie stuff, or Arcadian whitewash, always did.

Palermo pained her. Her grandparents had sailed from there. Why should she be afraid of Sicily, she wondered as she looked with growing panic into the staring eyes of the dirty children who followed her and Giorgio in the streets.

They were soon out in a rented car and they headed down the Palermitan coast towards the point where, on a promontory jutting over the violet sea, the poet resided in a place called Villa Luce.

"You know why I hate him, this prince or duke poet, whatever he is!" Connie said suddenly.

"Only a baron," said Giorgio affably. "And what does it matter—everyone is a baron down here."

"It does matter! Those barons are the ones who drove my grandparents out. Did you see those poor kids in Palermo? What have the barons ever done for their poor except load them on boats and ship them to America like garbage?"

"Well, he personally didn't have anything to do with your grandparents."

"Oh yes, he did—and does. It's a question of mentality and that's never changed."

She looked gloomily out at the passing landscape lit by the tepid winter sun. Would I have liked this better than Chicago, she wondered.

"The thought of him disgusts me."

"You've said that," said Giorgio.

"Holed up all his life in the family villa doing nothing but write poetry. I've written poetry, too, and my grandfathers were fishermen and goatherds!"

"You've told me."

"I'll tell him, too—in French."

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"He'll be interested."

"Don't be mean."

"How could I be mean to you?" he said with sudden affection. Then, after a long while, "What are you thinking of?"

"Oh, all sorts of things. . . like who am I, where did I get on, where do I get off? Where, in fact, am I going? And what about you—will you be here next year, next week, tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow for sure. You Americans! Can't you be content with the moment?"

"I'm going to be thirty-four."

They were coming to the end, she and Giorgio, she thought as they drove on with the sea there lapping on the shore like a pumped-up heartbeat.

They stopped for espresso in the village, a wretched cluster of hovels, which was the poet's postal address. The dingy bar was oppressive with silent, watching men. Connie went to wait in the car while Giorgio asked directions to the villa.

"What took you so long?" she asked when he joined her.

He laughed. "When they heard where we were going they filled me in on the local gossip: they say the poet had only one amorous experience in all his life. Someone got him a peasant girl one night and from that single encounter a son was born. But the Baron refuses any contact with mother or child and they'd be living in misery if the local doctor hadn't known the facts and convinced the Baron to make some anonymous provision for them. The boy must be about fifteen or sixteen now but his father has never wanted to see him."

"How gross!"

"Still you like his poetry—or don't you anymore?"

"I *do* like his poetry. He's a real poet. But how can it be?"

"It can be, if you don't think about it, you thinking American."

The villa gates were opened by a caretaker (the procurer of that peasant girl? Connie wondered) and they drove up a long avenue bounded by olive and citrus groves. Laid out in

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front of the villa was an exotic, repellent garden of cacti. Beyond that was a cemetery plot of little white crosses aligned symmetrically.

The poet stood at the portico of Villa Luce restraining a snarling wolf-dog on a leash. "Thank you for letting us come," said Giorgio as Connie put her hand into the soft white pulp of the poet's. Giorgio had made a deferential bow with his handshake.

"Are they family graves?" asked Connie, looking towards the plot of white crosses.

"Oh, yes," the poet lisped. "They're Thales' family," and he bent to stroke the still lunging dog, "and his family is mine. By metempsychosis."

The poet was dressed for a summer day. He wore a beige linen suit with a silk foulard knotted at his neckline. Giving Thales over to a servant he led them through several antechambers to a large salon. The cold was more penetrating than it had been outside. Connie thought of her own unheated flat in Rome where she at least had a portable kerosene stove to take from room to room.

The cold of Villa Luce was total and ineluctable. It intensified the dark shabbiness of the rooms, rooms filled with family pictures of sour-looking Sicilian aristocrats, dusty suits of armor, torn banners, glass-enclosed cases filled with the what-nots of past bored barons and baronesses, the fraying upholstery of the gloomy maroon furniture on which they sat.

The poet, a man of sixty, was old beyond reckoning. His face had the sallow tones of a broth made by slowly extracting the juices from flesh. Flaccid skin puckered into heavy creases and sagging jowls from which a wispy moustache gave a touching air of whimsy. His hair was parted down the middle into limp, greyish sweep bangs. He looked at his guests with eyes that alternated pride with sudden abstracted looks of anguish.

They conversed politely. Connie thought of mushrooms: decadence being cultivated as one cultivates mushrooms, in the dark. The poet was saying he had produced, in his life-

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time, three dozen poems. Perfect examples of Sicilian baroque the critics called them; polished fragments of a world caught on the brink of extinction.

The cold bit into her bones. She and Giorgio huddled into their coats watching their breath form as they talked. The poet, aware of their discomfort, finally took notice of it conversationally: "It's never really cold here as it is with you in the north. What cold we do have lasts no time at all—it doesn't seem worthwhile to put in heating and change our habits for so little."

Connie began to feel she was immured there, sure that she would never again be able to rise and would, finally, be laid to rest among the dogs under another white cross. She cast desperate looks at Giorgio who, with the excuse of photographing, was now moving around and warming himself. When she heard the rattle of china and footsteps of a servant in an adjoining room her spirits rose: tea was coming. . .or, better, perhaps the hot tangerine liqueur punch which is a Sicilian specialty.

"I hope you like Sicilian ices," said the poet, as the servant handed around dishes of an elaborate frozen dessert. "It is our chef d'oeuvre. I have always been a glutton for ices and this, I assure you, is the queen of all. I had it made for the occasion."

"That was kind," said Connie, aware of his mockery of them.

Poking at her ice, she watched as the poet lapped at his, giving it complete attention and sensual abandon.

Then, just as unaccountably as the fact that her ice was melting in the cold of that room, her revulsion turned to compassion. She felt compassion for her brother poet's hidden life; compassion for her grandparents who had been torn like weeds from their land; compassion for Giorgio who was now and always would be his mother's boy; compassion for herself and her fears.

Why should she be afraid of Sicily and think she had to placate this wild place, make overtures of peace and friend-

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ship to it, wish it well? It was she, now, who would send Sicily out of her life, not Sicily and the barons who would expel her.

She put down the dish of untouched ice, refusing it, and putting an end to the interview before it began. There was to be no story, there was to be no further pretense of an arrangement with Giorgio. What there was, instead, she realized, was a satori—with the poet as the unblocking elephant. She was getting unblocked of Giorgio and Sicily all at once. The trip was no *stronzo* after all but a moment of unique grace.

"I also write poetry," she said to the poet, looking into his bleary eyes.

"*Complimenti,*" he murmured politely.

"Perhaps you'd allow me to translate any new unpublished work you might have."

"I have nothing more. I have written thirty-six poems and that is all. Thirty-six. . . a perfect number. One mustn't push fate, you know."

"Yes, I know. My number is thirty-three—also perfect. But if you don't write poetry, what will you do?"

"I will wait to die," he said pleasantly, smiling.

She understood. One can't push fate, he had said; if one is born as he was, part of a complex eternity, one must refrain, accept, wait. Her good luck, instead, was that she had been given the fleeting.

On the boat back to Naples Connie told Giorgio what he already knew—that there would not be a story, that the trip hadn't worked along the lines they planned.

"I know," he said easily and she sensed his relief that they were finally accepting their relationship on its own impermanent terms.

"But it was a good trip, just the same. At least for me," she said.

"Oh? Why is that?"

"I found out something about myself. Who I am."

"And who are you?" he laughed.

"A Sicilian who is getting away," she said returning his smile.

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John Witte

If A Man

If a man steals his neighbor's shoes, he must
guard them day and night. He must not sleep.
He must try and eat them.

If a man sets fire to his neighbor's house,
so that his children run out, he must carry
ashes in his pockets all his days.

If a man's house falls down, and kills him,
the builder must rebuild the house.
He must rebuild the man.

And the same shall be true for women.

If a man leaves his woman, and lies with another
the children that appear between them
will be speechless.

If a man forces a woman against her desire,
he will be emptied of his orioles.
His deer will step away from him.

If a man lies with an animal, he must listen
to the ridiculous talk of animals. He must go on
all fours in his dream.

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And the same shall be true for women.

If a man hates his neighbor, an old dog
will follow him home. It will bite his hand.
It is his dog: he must take it in.

If a man harms his mother or father
he will smell of salami. He must wash
his hands over and over.

If a man strikes another, and he is crippled
he must carry for him, if blinded he must
see for him, if silenced speak.

And the same shall be true for women.

You must not shrink. You must keep and perform
that which you have promised
with your mouth.

And the same shall be true for women.

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Robert Louthan

When The Broadcast Ends

It's late, and for once
your radio turns on by itself,
with a stereo broadcast
of a pair of wings flapping,
one in each speaker.
As you stand between them,
the loud sound is balanced
so that the wings seem attached
to your shoulder blades.
When the broadcast ends,
they are, and take you away.

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Brian Swann

Description

The only tall trees are on islands. Autumn
fires keep the land clear—The river
suddenly went slippery and jade. On its banks

flowers of wild vine and eglantine gave off
an unsteady glow. The purity of air chilled,
and thunderheads heaved from the horizon,

dropping hailstones big as eggs. A spiral abyss
sucked lower clouds into its vortex and drew
the river upward, without touching. The sound

was worse than thunder. Any closer, and our whole
caravan would have made an ascension into such sky
as remained. But its own weight brought it down.

Floating groves waved in the new green chill.
The Sheyenne whose head was laid open
was predicting something we couldn't understand.

Dear Father, I know the soul's salvation
lies not in description. But think of this
as the soul's description—many plants I saw

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after the storm for the first time: rose-colored
lupine, five-petalled medicinal epinette, and
the prickly pear. The colors of the handsomest rose

are less pure and lively than the carnation
of this flower. The exterior of its chalice
is adorned with all shades of red and green.

Its petals are evasate like the sacred lily.
It will serve us better than the rose as emblem
of the vain pleasures of this nether world—

the thorns that surround it are more numerous,
and it almost touches the ground.

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The Paris Review Fine Art Editions

The Paris Review *was founded in the spring of 1952 by two young novelists living in Paris at the time—Harold L. Humes and Peter Matthiessen. Its first (and continuing) editor was George Plimpton who came to the project from postgraduate studies at King's College, Cambridge. William Styron described the purpose of the editors in a credo he wrote to introduce the first issue; "...to strive to give predominant space to the fiction and poetry of both established and new writers, rather than to the people who use words like Zeitgeist." In 1974 the magazine's base of operations was moved to New York. Many writers have been introduced in the magazine, among them Samuel Beckett, Evan S. Connell, Jr., Jack Kerouac, Philip Roth, Hughes Rudd and Terry Southern. The magazine has been particularly noted for its interviews in depth with established authors on the craft of writing—four volumes of which have been published by the Viking/Penquin under the title* Writers at Work.

In 1965, aided by a generous donation from Mrs. Henry J. Heinz, The Paris Review *initiated a series of prints by major contemporary artists. In November of that year the first twenty-three* Paris Review *prints were displayed at the Byron Gallery in New York. From the beginning the reviews were outstanding: "An extremely bright show" praised the* New York Times*; "Many of the artists are seen at their very best" reported John Gruen in the* Herald Tribune. *In 1967 an entire set of the prints was purchased by the Museum of Modern Art for its permanent collection. Three of them were displayed at the Museum's "Word and Image" show in 1968. Since its 1965 debut,* The Paris Review *Prints Series has continued to grow in number (37 posters have now been published) and in significance as a most valuable contribution to the history of the print as an art form.*

The posters have been printed under the direct supervision of the artists either by silk screen or lithography. Each one is published in an edition of 150 to 250, signed and numbered by the artist.

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Terese Svoboda

Never the moth's token

From the frank rendering of the sock
to the foot and the hem released
of its fold, with scent marking
the crevices like a possessive animal
who determinedly outlines over
and over the contours of habit,

the love-arms come uncrossed
in the dark night, their cashmere
turning to satin, a mere silken edge,
then the thinnest gauze, flapping
behind the branches with the moon
coming through, only inches from
where thread leaves the swaddling
for the shroud.

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Michael Stephens

Knives

Many spoons in the sink, and that means it was a dull night, too much coffee and ice cream, not enough foreplay. If there are many forks, it was probably a good night. But most importantly if there were many knives used, it was a great night, even if misunderstandings arose, people were stabbed, blood flowed. Spoons suggest measuring. After most suicides, detectives discover many spoons in the sink. There may be one knife that killed a person, but it is merely a symbol of too many spoons and forks: a wish for knives at table. Eliot was wise about spoons measuring life; even Edgar Lee Masters saw their monotony well enough. All those sentimental songs about "spooning". Even what spoon rhymes with is worthless: moon, June, croon. Spoon never rhymes with wife the way knife does. Forks are frequently connected with a type of sex, but what this type is—no one knows. And even the fork has a kind of character which can't be denied, and yet it is not the mark of an outstanding evening. The happy household is spoonless, but don't be fooled by chopsticks. Houses need knives. Families depend on knives to survive. A man may eat peas off a knife; he may drink blood from it. A sink filled with knives is a house that has had an eventful dinner.

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Two Poems by James Paul

The Nine

On the pitched rooftop, that one can give
No more mind to the things in the house.
Below in the dim room, that one can see
Out there, beyond wall, bones and the glow

Of eyelid and handflesh. The one telling
The smoke sees the involved face there
But cannot tell the others, and the one
Off the coast watches the body of water

That bears him flash into horizonless sky.
The one in the bed feels for the other,
The one in the mill is alone with the wheels,
And in the field, one figure just keeps going.

And hearing this, those who had opened and
Closed around things of their own, and were
Taken or given in marriages to their kind,
Asked where, offered the calm lines and eagles.

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Abraham Wonders

My child comes asking for bread, and I
Feel among the stones for the round loaf,
Squeezing each one. Bread gives, I
Recall; bread that is new, anyway.

All these stones have rolled down here
Like eyeballs plucked out and flung
From the cliffs, the mountains, rolling down
The hillsides onto these hot, flat plains.

The country up there is pitted with stone-sockets.
The rocks come out clean and round, leaving
No covenant behind but the scar, unlike
Bread, which can pare from itself, like children.

Down here, you see pilgrims dragging
Sacks of stones. They think to provision
Their journey. But they have forgotten. Even
An old blind man with a child can tell.

I tell the child not to curse the stones:
They seem to endure to release us, but they
Have killed us instead. And wheat, dough, bread
Need hands, like good children, cast among them.

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Robert B. Shaw

Out Back In The Evening

Noticing now how trees in twilight gather
closer, more in command than you know them to be,
snags the eye on advancing time foreshortened,
jostling topheavy into your modest plot.

As if a signal—could it have been the porchlight?—
beckoned them nearer in, a noose never yielding,
or as if twenty years' growth had come
upon them in the blink of a wearying eye. . . .

It goads you on to envision the day when noon
will show no brighter here than the summer dusk,
when the damp grass you stand on and the benighted
folk in the house will not have known for years

days when the sun would pour unbaffled down.
If you came back to it then, could you manage to care
as bitterly as you do in the noiseless fall
of dew, strange to a place you know each stone of?

Past time to go in. By the back porch steps
the cat claws up at a glitter he can't ever catch:
bright eyes, fireflies, hunter and hunted, alike
innocent of foreboding, at home anywhere.

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Nina Schneider

Earth Science

There is a resonance in stone.
Just put your ear against the grave of one
You hated because love was difficult to bear.

Wait until the diggers drop their picks
To hop the truck for home,
For the sun to throb and darken.

You will hear a low pulse
Quake through the ground
Troubling the graven images of angels.

As Earth chills your fevers from the west
The tick-tock of belated expiation
Will rock the mausoleum in your breast.

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Two Poems by James Moore

The Weak Light

flickers across the bed.
I reach for you,
brush the hair from your face,
pull up the blanket over
your bare shoulder. The strands
of hair at your forehead
are mostly white. In this light,
that is mostly darkness,
I feel free to kiss your eyelids.
I remember

the mist rising from a river
one early morning drive,
years ago, along
the interstate. White
hair in the gray light. Where
was I driving then, and who,
now, is painting your hair
strand by strand, the color
of mist rising over
a forgotten river?

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Rothko

He saw the gray on black, and that
was that. Two shapes of dark
came at him, parted, waited.
Shapes had been like chairs before.
He could always rest in a shape.
Before the gray came,
every oblong was a way to say the world,
a pitched tent of color in the wild
and arbitrary forest of all our longings.
He even found his own Matisse,
his homage, in oblongs, like a window
thrown open on yellow and orange, on patterns
that only the casual eye, lazy with joy, can find.
Sometimes he dreamt the world pastel,
dreamy curtains of color he hung
over bars of light, and left to be opened.
But he couldn't drench the black.
So, he painted what he owed it: square
after square. He gave the black
that final gray, a last oblong weight,
the simple and furious grave above the black,
the last place he had to go to paint. It was
hardly dry, but he went in to stay, inside
the shape he had made himself of himself.

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Katha Pollitt

Of the Scythians

who came whirling out of the North
like a locust-swarm, storm-darkening the sky,
their long hair whipping in the wind like the manes of
horses,
no one remembers anything now but I:

how they screamed to the slaughter, as the skirl of a
thousand flutes
fashioned from enemies' thighbones shrilled them on.
Naked they rode. We stood by our huts, stunned mute:
gold flashed from each spear, gold glittered on each arm.

I was a child in the temple. The old priest
hid me in a secret cellar with the images.
Above my head I heard him chant a last
prayer to the god. Since then

I scorn to mix with those who have come after.
Fat farmers, milky scribblers! What do they know
who have never heard the Scythians' terrible laughter
or seen in the wind their glittering wild hair flow?

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George Bradley

August In The Apple Orchard

It seems someone else was interested in order, too—
The squat trees edging away down the slope
In wavy lines like rivulets—but wasn't very good at it,
And left you to make the best of the result.
But you can't very well tear up Uncle Jack's half-acre
On a whim, and besides, the view isn't unattractive,
Just arbitrary.

So you are sleepy and looking through branches at the sky
When a few birds fly in from the next field
And start singing a sad old song you have heard before,
Like the woman's voice out of a second story window
Singing, "Am I Blue?" Things are no better off next door.
The sun is setting now behind a hill, and if you could
squint
Enough, maybe it would look, red and round,
Like another apple.

You wonder which person you think of first, seeing apples:
Newton, or your dumpy Sunday-school teacher, who said
It wasn't necessarily an apple, probably a fig.
Now the crisis is coming again, the ripeness-gravity vectors
Are about to intersect. Any day, several men in shirtsleeves
Will climb little ladders and take pride in turning
All the bruised fruit into mush.

If you could just let well enough alone, it would all get by
In its own haphazard manner, each apple making its own
Thud, and the birds pecking at the soft, sticky stuff.
If you could leave it alone, the trees would stump around
The hillside, waving at each other and shrugging
The gnarled growth of their limbs—moving casually
In the twilight, under a pale sky.

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Edie Sedgwick: A Reminiscence

Bobby Andersen

I met Margouleff just after I got out of the hospital where I was seriously ill with hepatitis and told every day that I wasn't going to make it, and was all prepared to die. I came out all traumatized. Very strange. Margouleff came along. I was so weak already from exhaustion I was ready to fall down in the street. I had lost my apartment and everything in it. He walked up to me and he said, "Hello, you big tomato." I said, "Get the hell out of here. Leave me alone, you creep."

He could see that I was not feeling well and he took me home to his apartment. I never left. I stayed there for three and a half years. When I met Margouleff he was importing Hercules movies and dubbing them in English at ABC city. When he said that he was going to make an above-ground underground film, we all made a lot of faces and everything. He said someone called Edie Sedgwick was going to star in it. I'd never heard of her. I envisioned this blonde, pig-tailed, freckle-faced, homely, wire-rim glasses type from the name: Edie Sedgwick. It didn't sound very glamorous or pretty.

You should have heard the way Margouleff carried *on* about her! He hated Edie. He couldn't compete with her. She was so erratic, at least as far as he was concerned. He couldn't understand that anyone could get that high on drugs. All he did was smoke a little pot every once in a while; he never had even a drink. And here were all these people

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Edie Sedgwick

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around him with needles in their asses and everything, shooting amphetamine. I don't think he understood all that vibrancy, all that stimulation that the drugs get going in them.

That was how I got involved. Apparently Edie wasn't showing up; they couldn't get her to learn lines, or do this, or that. She had been burned in the Chelsea fire, but no one wanted to take care of her. Everyone had refused. So Margouleff asked me if I wanted a job that paid twenty-five dollars a day to make sure that she got up in the morning, had her face washed and turned up at the studio in proper attire and behaved herself.

I said, Sure! I figured I'd be a real male nurse and real nasty.

Margouleff's was a very strange apartment. He owned it and paid the rent. After that, it was my apartment. Every room was different: a psychedelic room, a Victorian room, a Georgian room. The kitchen was the best. It was painted as an American flag. I spent a month's work on the refrigerator to make it look like a Coke vending machine.

Margouleff used to tell everybody that I was his houseboy, which I thought was very insulting. I fixed the apartment up; I decorated it; I ran it. It was in the East Village, a fabulous ramshackle six-room railroad flat, and one day I walked in and looked down to the end where sitting at the harpsichord was this breathtaking blonde that I could see from six rooms away. . . frosted blonde. I walked over. She stood and asked, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm Bobby. I live here. Who are you?" She said, "I'm Edie Sedgwick. Are you my nurse?"

She had these two people with her, one a boy named Anthony Ampule and a friend of his named Donald, who was a professor. On the harpsichord they had this big pile of methedrine, which they were scooping up and mixing into water. Anthony Ampule was called that because he was able to get vials of liquid amphetamine from his doctor. I don't know what his real name is; even today he's called Anthony Ampule. They were standing there at the harpsichord measuring

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out their methedrine. I looked at Edie and I said to myself, "Well how *fabulous!* This fabulous creature!" She was so *electric*. . . just wonderful! I decided about four minutes after I knew her that she was not an Edie, she was an Edith.

She didn't go out that night. She hadn't brought much of anything with her. She had these great big baseball mitts for hands because of the Chelsea fire, all covered with gauze and bandages. I went out to Max's Kansas City and brought back some food for her. Double shrimp cocktail. A chocolate malted, which they made only for her there. Mickey Ruskin, the owner, would go in the back and melt the ice cream and beat it and make her a chocolate milk shake.

That was how I met her. I was so pleased. I just thought she was wondrous instantly. So I wasn't a hideous male nurse at all. We caught on like wildfire and we got along so well it was wonderful. At Max's they used to call me "Edie's nurse," but I didn't mind. We'd have drinks there and put it on Margouleff's account! Terrible! Those were the days of signing for everything on anybody's name. Everybody was very rude about it.

I used to have the greatest fun out of making Edith get all dressed up. At Max's it was as if Queen Elizabeth had arrived. Edith had the most wondrous wardrobe, even after the Chelsea fire. What she lost in the fire, I think were furs and jewelry. She kept telling me that her hands were hideously burned, that she expected, when the mitts came off, that she would have grotesque, deformed, webbed hands. When Dr. Roberts finally took the mitts off she was excited and very surprised. Her hands were in perfect shape.

She looked fabulous in everything! I remember going out with her in the afternoon when she had on what she called her "mini" evening gown. She'd seen a full-length velvet gown in the window at Bergdorf's trimmed in egret feathers. She went in and bought it and because the mini skirt was in such vogue then she had the evening dress cut to mini size and had the feathers put back on. That was her "mini" evening gown. Over that she wore a black ostrich-plume coat,

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peacock feather earrings, and black satin gloves up to here with ostrich plume bows on the top. In broad daylight in the East Village. She was incredible! With a huge black straw hat over it.

We went to Coney Island like that. She took her first and only subway ride in New York. The people on the train just loved her. She never sat down the whole way out; the train was so crowded we stood all the way from the East Village to Coney Island. She was in all that mad regalia with a bathing suit underneath so we could go swimming. The people loved her. She was talking to everyone and getting along. We rode in the first car so she could look out of the window in the front. She was fascinated by the tunnels and the weaving of the train and the clacking. Just fabulous. She'd never experienced anything like it.

We did everything. We had cotton candy; ate hot dogs at Nathan's, we went on the parachute jump, the roller coaster; we went swimming in the surf and lying in the sun. We collected shells and rocks and brought back two completely chewed corncobs for souvenirs. We did everything. The funhouse. She was just incredulous. . . all wild-eyed and goo-gaa. The distortion mirrors. And the laughing and the laughing.

She screamed all the way up and all the way down the Parachute Jump, the big peacock feather earrings standing straight out from her head. We got on the log sluice ride with those big silicone logs, and you came down this big sluice, and the water splashed over her feathers and hat and everything, and she just loved every minute of it. I took her on the ride where the man in the gorilla costume chases after your car—one of those Spook House things. She just *loved* him, carrying on with him and asking him into the car with us.

On the carrousel she rode on the swan—a double- or triple-seater with the silhouette of a swan on either side. She said, "Birds of a feather ought to stick together."

She had a bikini under her dress and we went swimming—leaving all this velvet and feathers strewn all over the beach in the midst of these Puerto Rican people and black people and

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everything. We went way over our heads swimming. Then we came home on the subway with all the rush hour crowds. The front car both times. Oh, she just loved it! We came home so exhausted.

She was happy at Margouleff's. I never left her for a minute, even when she went to work! We'd go to the banks together. I remember once going down to pick up the trust fund checks and having her pay for the cab with a pearl and diamond ring one day, and a gold bracelet another day because we didn't have enough money to pay the cab. He refused to wait. He took the ring when he read the carat weight inside.

She had on a big star sapphire ring which she said was worth $2500. It fell out of the setting three times to my knowledge, and she kept putting it back in. The fourth time it fell out onto the dance floor; she got annoyed with it and just stomped and pounded it into the dance floor and threw the setting across the room. She left the sapphire embedded in there. Edith wasn't bothered by things like that. She was just fabulous!

We used to share the same bed every night. It wasn't that I had to watch her, we were just that close. In the morning I used to try to feed her omelettes and stuff but she just wouldn't hear about it. She wanted cold shrimp and milk shakes. I'd say, "Edith, please. You're on the Lower East Side, honey. Come down a little."

"I just want what I want. . . what I'm used to."

"Come on, honey," I'd say. "You're making it very difficult for me. I have to make you up, bathe you, I have to do all this crap. I have to have a good time with you, and yet you want me to go out and buy fucking gourmet food at nine in the morning."

In the beginning I had to help her put on her make-up because her hands were these big mitts. I had to put the eyelashes on, and zip her up, and help get her bra on and this and that. I knew how to do make-up because I had studied it at the Fashion Institute. She'd sit on the stool in the kitchen

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with 500 bottles of make-up spread out on the counter. I made her tell me exactly what she wanted. She'd point with her big stumps and say, "Make it darker there," or whatever. She was very big on the black makeup. At the time she still had a few light burns on her face that I covered up with foundation make-up.

I used to have to bathe her. I'd put plastic around the bandages with rubber bands to keep it tight. She'd been there a week and she hadn't taken a bath. She'd say, "Oh, my bandages...this, that, I'll get this wet." She went through stages where she was very unclean, though she never smelled. I guess she was just so high on amphetamines it never registered. She always looked immaculate and beautiful.

In the evening we'd help each other get dressed for the parties. I used to really get off making her very fabulous and beautiful. She'd go in my closet and get things to dress me. She'd go in her boxes and crates and dig out all these things. Scarves were very big then. And jewelry. I wore her trousers because we were about the same size in pants. After her hands were healed, she would comb my hair, and I used to do her hair. She got me to grow my hair back blonde. It was white then, because they had convinced me that I was going to be an underground movie star. I was very stupid and affected all the time. My hair was snow-white, along with my eyebrows, my eyelashes, my sideburns...everything was white. People would come up: "Oh, if I ever had hair like that, I'd give my right arm for it."

I'd say, "Well, it cost seven dollars a week...you can have it."

They just didn't believe it wasn't real. No, I didn't have a pierced ear then, but I had a front tooth missing then due to drugs and bad diet and poverty. Ruined my whole mouth. These teeth are all artificial.

Sometimes we'd spend two days getting dressed and we'd sail right past the party we were going to. That's a common amphetamine phenomenon. It's not that everything's slowed

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down. In fact, everything's carried on at a rapid pace; but it's a problem of trying *every* combination, trying on every stitch with everything. . .until finally getting a complete outfit and being all ready to go and suddenly deciding that maybe you'll just change the scarf, and then you do that and realize that something else doesn't go with the scarf, so you change that something else, and you become completely disoriented. You spend all night getting dressed, and by then you completely forget where you're supposed to be going. By the time you're done, you're so exhausted you lay down and go to sleep.

If you stayed up too long on amphetamines your vision could play tricks on you. Every car you passed with bucket seats had two people sitting in it. Every tree had someone behind it. You'd see people in the windows waving at you. You'd walk down the street and hear people calling your name. "Bobby, Bobby, Bobby," and I'd look all around, and there was no one there. Then there are also voids. During a conversation you'd realize that you'd just blacked out for a moment—a whole gap in which you hadn't heard anything.

There's no remembrance of what you do under those amphetamines overdoses. You get up, move around, roam and do things. Once I got up in the middle of the winter with no shoes on, nothing but a pair of slacks and a raccoon coat. And I walked for blocks for a pack of cigarettes, pounding on the front door of shops at five in the morning, insisting that they open up, and flagging a bus down by standing in front of it and making it stop: "Drive me to my street!" I remembered nothing. Tommy Slocum, the Indian boy who lived with us occasionally, and who followed me to make sure that nothing happened to me, told me the next day what I'd gone and done; I just didn't believe it.

When Edith first came to live with us, I had never given anybody any kind of needle in my life; I just didn't know anything about it. When Edith said, "My dear, would you give me a poke?" I didn't know what a poke was. So I said, "Sure, tell me what it is."

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She took me into the bathroom when she had the needle all ready. I went, "Oh, no, no, no, no. I can't do this." She said, "Sure, you can, it's very easy."

We went back and forth for twenty minutes before I was able to stick it in her behind. It was like stabbing somebody, to me. I was *so* frightened. I kept asking, "Does it hurt? Does it hurt?" She kept saying, "No no no no no." She was holding onto the sink. She was all dressed; she had on navy blue corduroy pants and a Pucci halter top and a matching turban, and of course the pants were down so I could push the needle in her behind. I tried three times. I really almost fainted and fell off the toilet seat. I kept saying, "Don't you want to swallow it, or something?"

After a while I could give her an injection any time. In fact, I got pleasure out of giving people needles after a while. It was always made to sound very cute and "toy" to pull your pants down for the shot—"toy" meaning child-like. Very nursery school. But in a way it's sexual, because you're giving someone a very large injection of something very fabulous and stimulating, which gives them a sexual sensation after they get it. I've seen people actually reach an orgasm on amphetamine.

But getting poked really did hurt Edith because she began to develop a lot of scar tissue on her fanny, and she had to use big, thick needles to get it in. There's foreign matter with a lot of the street drugs, and it sort of sat in her fat tissue. These are all things I've learned since then. My dear, Richie Berlin's behind! Brigid's beautiful sister. They used to call it Rocky Mountain Range and everything. Rhoda Buddha's Rocky Mountains—Rhoda Buddha was Richie's nickname. She could give herself shots. But Edith refused to do it herself. She didn't want to take that step down the hill.

When I first met them all, I wouldn't have them touch me with a needle. I took a couple of pills once in a while; I would get high on those, and it was fabulous. They kept showing me this powder and saying it's the same thing. Finally I let Geneviève give me a poke; it put me in St. Vincent's

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Hospital. I almost lost my leg. She had used a very long hypodermic and because I have a very small behind, it went right through the muscle where it belonged. I was almost paralyzed for life. Gangrene and everything. In return for which they called me up at the hospital and told me to eat a lot of fresh fruit! That's how serious it was to all of them. . . all these people working on *Ciao! Manhattan.* They thought it was just hilarious.

Then I got going on it. Getting pokes. I remember going into the Brasserie Restaurant and having the little old bathroom attendant do it for me. I was so spaced out I couldn't do it myself. I told him I was a diabetic. He said, "Oh, ah can't do dat. Ah can't do dat." I said, "Look, I'll just hold it here and you walk up behind me and hit it with your hand." I had it in place for him. It was a machine like a small pistol, just the cutest thing. It's like holding a water gun against your behind and squeezing the trigger. So anyway the bathroom attendant closed his eyes, and *pop* he went and hit it.

When Edith lived with me she had a purse she carried around for the drugs—a picnic basket that was about two feet wide and a foot and a half deep which was filled with hundreds of little zipper bags, plastic bags, plastic boxes, bubblegum bubbles, a lot of it to hold syringes, cotton balls, little vials of alcohol, amphetamines, pills, tranquillizers. Everything was inside of something else. That's an amphetamine dementia. Lots of order. You find something that fits in this box. Then you find something that this box fits in; everything goes inside something else, and it's all very mazey, but tight and orderly. It's known as being anal compulsive. It's an amphetamine trait. Most people who take amphetamines are very neat: they'll fluff up a pillow to make it look nice while you're still sitting on it. They empty ashtrays. Edith could spend hours unloading her purse. And then start packing it up again, and forget what she was looking for when she started. Incredible! Anywhere. On the sidewalk, on the street, in a restaurant, a bar. Hundreds of things would

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come out to be unscrewed and looked in and then screwed back up and replaced. *So* many things. It was like carrying an entire lifestyle with you . . . like living with a camper van on your back. Oh, it was definitely an amphetamine thing. They all did it; they all had tote bags. I had a tote bag. I don't mean to exclude myself from all of these things I'm talking about, because we were all the same.

She took that basket with her when we went out. We went out a lot. One night we went to see Jimi Hendrix give a special performance at Steve Paul's *The Scene.* Edith had talked about it for days in advance. We went in Margouleff's gold Cadillac, which we parked illegally on Eighth Avenue. We had no reservations, but she did a whole production demanding to see Steve Paul, letting them know just who she was, and we got a special ringside table in a corner, kind of private but public so you could be seen at the same time. Edith was very quiet through the whole thing. She spent most of the performance going through her wicker basket, opening plastic bubblegum capsules that she had buttons in, and loose hypodermic needles. While this was going on, Jim Morrison, the rock star, got up on the stage and went through an adoration number. He took down Hendrix's pants and went down on him right up there on the stage. At first everyone's mouths fell open. When it was over, they applauded and screamed. Edith thought it was absolutely fabulous, but disgusting. Did Hendrix mind? Oh no, I guess not! Well, what man *would* mind? Those people were so very uninhibited anyway, they were all so stoned. I don't think Hendrix had an orgasm. None of those people were able to reach an orgasm easily because of the quantity of drugs they were on at all times.

Edith took so many! Along with her amphetamine usage, she took barbiturates to go to sleep. That's why she had so many fires—because she was in such a barbiturate fog that it would cause a roller-coaster reaction, and eventually she would nod off with cigarettes. In the Margouleff apartment alone she went through three mattresses and about five fires.

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It was incredible how fast she could set a bed on fire with a cigarette. The trouble was you'd have to wait for her to pass out to take the cigarette out of her fingers. She'd get really indignant and bitchy if you tried while she knew what you were doing.

Yet you'd leave the room, gone just two minutes, and BOOM, the next thing you know she'd be asleep and there'd be smoke coming out of the bed and a hole in the mattress this big.

Sometimes she took so many barbiturates to go to sleep, and was so high on amphetamines, that she had convulsions and scared me half to death...wicked. She'd say all the things in her subconscious that had been bothering her... that she'd been smiling at people and kissing their asses for nothing. She let it all out. She attacked Margouleff viciously; she'd call him a "cheap kike" to his face. She was *wicked!* "You rotten kike, you cheap bastard, Jew motherfucker, small-time entrepreneur!"

He'd say, "Get her to bed. Tie her down, if you have to."

He seemed very practical about the whole thing. But then all of a sudden, sitting there, he'd begin to shake. He was so traumatized by that whole experience. He was a neurotic forever afterward. Just incredible!

As for Margouleff's parents, I think they really almost just died from it! I mean to go through so much money and find that they'd been spending it on a bunch of drug addicts sitting there cutting the film into tiny one inch strips of film showing some pigeons in the air and saying, "How fabulous!" That was what Geneviève was doing before they took her away. She cut I don't know how many hours and ended up with two squares of celluloid of pigeons that she thought were the *best.* She was just sitting there all wired up. The Margouleffs really didn't appreciate that.

Edith's parents, of course, were terribly concerned too and I think very sincere, about what was happening to their daughter. There were telephone calls to California. They turned up on the telephone bills...Margouleff screaming:

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"I'm not paying for this! I'm paying her a salary. That's enough." Mrs. Sedgwick...I felt like I was talking to my own mother. She wanted me to report to her. "Well, how badly burned is she?"

"Well, it's all right, Mrs. Sedgwick. The doctor is doing a lot and he says there won't be any physical damage...maybe a little nerve damage."

Then she'd hem and haw and I knew what was coming next. "Is she on drugs?"

I'd just met Edith. So I said, "Well, Mrs. Sedgwick, she's off drugs and she hasn't been on them." That's truly what I thought. All the time Edith in the background would be giving me signals with those big bandaged hands. If I ever got even *near* a topic that was sensitive...there was a lot of waving of those big baseball mitts.

"She's not on heroin, is she?"

I'd say, "Oh, no, not on heroin"...and Edith would go "Mmmmmm," waving her hands in the air.

"Is she drinking? Is she still an alcoholic?"

"Mrs. Sedgwick," I'd say. "I've never seen her pick up a glass with anything but fruit juice and milk in it."

"Oh thank you," Mrs. Sedgwick would say. "I'm so glad she finally has someone who cares."

I wondered how many times she'd said this to someone on the phone. She must have been through it a hundred times. I could tell she was going through a great deal of grief...I mean, she was a real mother, and I felt sorry for her.

Then Edith would get onto the phone and I'd listen in on the extension so Edith and I could talk about it afterwards. Edith would ask to talk to her father but he wouldn't come to the phone. "Your father has to do this...he has to do that...he isn't feeling well. Edith, you don't know what you're doing to your father." All she ever got was, "Your father, your father, your father." Just hammered up her back.

Edith begged. Cried. Quite a few times. He would *not* speak to her. She had so many mixed, tortured emotions

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about that man. She loved him, she worshipped him; she hated him.

Her mother would say, "He can't come to the phone. Edith, please, don't put me through this."

Sometimes Edith would wait until she'd hung up and then she'd cry. Sometimes she'd get really furious and outraged, and scream about it. She'd turn cold and clinical as she'd describe her childhood and the things they'd done to her. She told me her father once tried to punish her by taking her out to the corral, tying her to a post and whipping her in front of all the servants and the ranch help. She had this incredible fascination for her father. She made him sound like a sadistic Bluebeard, how incredibly unbearable and cruel he was...I'm sure she was exaggerating, because people on amphetamines tend to do that lot. For example, she showed me all these fabulous equestrian sculptures that I now understand her father did and said that *she* had done them...pulling out these photographs of enormous sculptures to show me. In those days I just didn't think it was possible for people to sit and fabricate things like that, so I was very impressed and awed. I kept saying: "You really did that? You did that yourself? With your little hands and your little body and your little person?" she kept saying, "Oh, and you should have seen some of the other things I've given away to doctors at the hospitals I've stayed."

Well! That's an amphetamine thing...to fib. It could show a desire to duplicate her father in herself, couldn't it? He really must have been a bastard.

And yet I never met anyone who wanted to go home so much. I think she wanted to see her father—all these trumped-up fantasies about going to California to visit him. She had her children's books with her...her name inside in scratchy little handwriting. Nursery story books...most of them English imports from these smart little California bookshops. She cherished them. "This is from this time of my life...these are from my childhood when I was a little girl."

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She showed me photographs. "This is home, this is from my childhood, this is my father's. . . this is my mother's. . ." Home, home, home, home. All I heard about was the name of the town near the ranch: Los Olivos, Los Olivos, Los Olivos. Her horses. How big and wonderful it all was.

And then suddenly it would turn the other way. She would tell me how terrible it was and how awful her parents were. Now that her two brothers were gone, she said she was the current scapegoat. She described her father as cantankerous, vicious, and dominant. . . a dictator in his little country out there in California. . . that they had a couple of villages encompassed there on the ranch, and everyone there was a serf.

She used to show me pictures of herself on cruises and in Europe. . . pictures of her on an ocean liner. She must have been at least 30 to 40 pounds heavier. I could hardly believe it was the same person. She used to say, "Isn't it incredible?" She had looked so much like little Miss Innocence; a healthy All-American girl, and what a lovely debutante. But Edith didn't much like herself like that. She would say, "Aren't I ridiculous? I look like all the rest of them. Don't you think I'm more fabulous now?" Well, I agreed. She *was* more fabulous.

Oh, I was totally awed and impressed to have such a glamorous, exciting woman in my company. I was totally infatuated and madly in love with her. One night—it was the night she had so many drugs she had convulsions and set fire to the bed—we curled up, started to go to sleep; I put my hand under a sort of t-shirt she was wearing. She responded. But so very gently. Hardly any physical movement at all. It was totally boring and uninteresting — like having sex with a child. She didn't even know how to kiss. She was very fond of kissing around the hair-line with little gentle kisses.

When Edith was with someone she really liked and she was on speed and wide awake she would have been the wildest fuck in town. Amphetamines make you very wild and degenerate about sex, they really do. . . very creative and demented. It's like an eight hour non-stop stretch of sniffing amyl-

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nitrate. You have no idea. No idea! So wonderful, so inspired, so uninhibited. . . it's one of the truly inspired sex accessories there ever was. You become a sex addict—it's divine. That's the main reason so many of that crowd took it because that's what they all had in their minds ninety percent of the time: sex. Totally sex-oriented. Amphetamine was only fabulous for that. Everything else that it did for you was boring.

But this night with Edith I was very disappointed. She didn't even remember it, never mentioned it: which was a little heartbreaking. I don't think she really knew how to be in love with anybody. . . not just because of what happened that night. If you don't love yourself, you can't love anybody else. Sex to her that night was about as useful as when I gave her a bath or combed her hair or helped her across the street; I was like a Boy Scout. But she was very drugged. How much can a dead body enjoy a piece of sex?

It was strange. She thought nothing of exposing her lower sexual area and always covering her breasts. Even that night we had sex, she kept the top on and took her pants off. Her breasts were about the size of pears; very small breasts. . . which is very attractive on certain women. Especially for me, because I don't know what to do with very large breasts.

I thought she'd be kind of great. Absolutely great. She was so dynamic on so many levels. Sexually, physically, since she was very lithe, and very muscular, I didn't think she'd be that different. And the face. I've always been in love with the face. The face is *everything* to me. I've been to bed with more trolls that had beautiful faces. I even picked up somebody with a beautiful face who turned out to be a deformed dwarf with no arms and one leg—I swear to *God*—a man I met in a bar. I couldn't tell that just about everything on him was artificial. He was just beautiful; he could sing opera like a *professional* he was so talented. He *was* quite short. Very short. He came back to my apartment, and I *thought* he was walking funny. I was so dumb. This beautiful, beautiful face! You have no idea what I went through. When we got to my

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room, he took off his arms and dropped them to the floor. On one side, the left side, he had a whole hand coming out of his shoulder. On the other side, he just had this little finger sticking out of his body. I laugh about it now, but... oh, my God! Then he unhooked his leg. I was sitting there in total shock, looking. Then he stood on the one leg that was really there, balancing on this little leg, and shaking as he leaned way forward, these little fingers pushed his underwear down: and I fainted! I absolutely fainted. He had two cocks that grew together and then separated into two heads. I just slid down to the floor. He was saying: "Do you mind if I take a bath?"

I said, "No. Please do. Take a bath."

So he hopped in and filled the tub—God knows how he did it...I mean with *what?* One of those little appendages?

I must have waited five hours for him to come out of that bathroom. When he was in there I never heard a sound. I kept listening; I was waiting for the water to splash, anything. I said, "Oh my God! This *thing* is dead in my bathroom! It drowned!"

He finally came out and I put him to sleep on the couch. He was getting off on what he was doing, taking everything off and shocking me. The next day I told him, "Please. Listen. If I could *buy* you a contract at the Metropolitan Opera so you could sing, I would. Anything! But you have to leave!"

When Edith was in Margouleff's apartment with me there was always a stream of people turning up—maybe not as strange as the opera singer, but just as twisted! People hustled her. Mostly under the guise of getting drugs for her. She was always very trusting and also open to receiving something new to get high on. She'd hand out hundreds of dollars and the people going out to get the drugs just wouldn't bother coming back.

She was really a terribly absurd person...people just conning it out of her, or just borrowing it, or stealing it. I remember only once I actually abused her. I took two dollars

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off her when I was broke. I was never so ashamed of anything in my life. I went to Max's to meet some people. She gave me hell in the morning for it. She said, "I had five dollars when I went to sleep and there's only three left." I said, "Well, I took two dollars out of your pocketbook." I was never so ashamed of anything. What can I say? They were very strange times.

Well, it came to an end. Edith ran away from the apartment finally. I really never did know why. Perhaps a dispute between her and the people with *Ciao! Manhattan.* I think they cut off her salary. I don't think they paid her very much. There wasn't much left anyway. Mr. and Mrs. Margouleff really went for their lungs on that film. A great deal of money went down the drain. . . most of it into those people's fannies.

What also happened was that Edith got involved with this boy, Harvey Horvito, who kept telling her he could get speed in the Bronx, *speed in the Bronx.* All of a sudden she disappeared and went to the Bronx with him. I didn't hear from her for almost a month. Nothing. It broke my heart. She left everything at the house, but we didn't know where to get in touch with her.

Then one afternoon she showed up. She'd cut her hair really short. She was extremely drawn. . . worse than I'd ever seen her. I wasn't even sure it was her. She wouldn't talk to me. I didn't know what I'd done. Finally I grabbed her by the neck and dragged her into the bathroom; I demanded to know what was going on. We made up immediately. But then she disappeared again. That afternoon I never could find out what had happened, until I heard she was in the hospital. I got Edith's address from Geneviève. She wrote me from the hospital. She did some drawings on one of them—a rat and a rabbit.

It certainly changed my life for a very long time. That whole weird experience of Edith and *Ciao! Manhattan.* I have no idea how long she stayed with me. It seemed like a lifetime.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Paulé Barton was born in 1916 and raised in the Haitian village of Verrettes; he lived mainly as a goatherd. He was imprisoned in St. Dimanche under the oppressive Duvalier regime, and subsequently lived on several Caribbean islands. He died in Costa Rica in 1974. A collection of his stories, *The Woe Shirt* (Penmaen Press) is soon to be published.

Helen Barolini has a story in the anthology *Love Stories by New Women*. Her novel, *Umbertina* (Seaview Books), appeared recently. She lives in Ossining, New York.

T. Coraghessan Boyle has appeared twice before in *The Paris Review*. His collection of stories, *Descent of Man* (Atlantic-Little, Brown), won the 1980 St. Lawrence Award for Fiction, and was recently published in paperback (McGraw-Hill). A novel, *Water Music* (Atlantic-Little, Brown), from which "Mungo Among the Moors" is excerpted, will appear next year.

Güneli Gün is a Turkish writer living in Oberlin, Ohio. Her *Book of Trances* (Julian Friedman Publishers, London, 1979), will soon appear in Spanish translation. She has completed work on an experimental novel, *Temple of Metamora*.

Howard Norman has worked with Paulé Barton on translations in Jamaica and Trinidad. His prose, translations from several languages, and radio plays, have appeared in many journals. He was the recipient of a fellowship from the Translation Center at Columbia University.

POETRY

Athan Anagnostopoulos teaches at Boston University. His translations include Seferis's *A Poet's Journal* and Angelos Terzakis's *Homage to the Tragic Muse*.

Paul Auster is currently editing an anthology of 20th-century French poetry as translated by British and American poets, to be published by Houghton Mifflin in 1981, and is working on a memoir and a collection of poems.

Dick Barnes teaches medieval literature and creative writing at Pomona College. His book of poems, *A Lake On the Earth* (Momentum Press), is to be published this year.

Judith Baumel teaches at Boston University and is associate coordinator of the Blacksmith Poetry Program in Cambridge. Her poems have been published in numerous magazines.

George Bradley lives in Brooklyn, New York. His poems have appeared in a variety of publications.

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Tom Disch will publish a book of poems, *ABCDEFG HIJKLM NPOQRST UVWXYZ* (Anvil Press), in London this year, and a novel, *Neighbors* (Scribner's), written with Charles Naylor, in 1981.

Odysseus Elytis won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1979.

James Galvin lives in Trinidad, California. A collection of his poems is soon to be published by Doubleday.

John Koethe is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. His book of poems, *Domes.* won the 1973 Frank O'Hara Award.

Robert Louthan is the author of *Shrunken Planets* (Alicejamesbooks), his first book.

James Moore is the author of a book of poems called *What the Bird Sees* (Momentum Press, 1978). He lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he is working on both prose and poetry.

James Paul teaches English at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. His poems have appeared in a number of journals.

Katha Pollitt lives and writes in New York City.

Mark Rudman is writing a book on Robert Lowell for the Columbia Writers Series.

Nina Schneider is the author *The Woman Who Lived in a Prologue,* a novel that appeared this year. Her poems have appeared in a variety of publications.

Mark Schorr teaches at Milton Academy in Milton, Mass.

Robert B. Shaw teaches at Yale. His most recent book of poems appeared from Wesleyan University Press.

Michael Stephens is the author of *Shipping Out* (Apple-wood Press). He teaches at Fordham.

Terry Stokes is the author of books of poetry including *Passion,* and *Boning the Dreamer.* His most recent book is *Intimate Apparel* (Release Press), a collection of short fiction.

Terese Svoboda has published poems in several magazines. She has completed a book of Nuer (African) songs in translation and is working on a film series for public television on oral poetry in performance.

Brian Swann has published numerous poems, stories and translations, particularly from the Italian. He teaches humanities at the Cooper Union in New York.

John Witte is the author of *Loving the Days* (Wesleyan), published in 1978. He is currently the editor of the *Northwest Review.*

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ART

John Baldessari was born in National City, California, in 1931, and currently lives in Venice, California. Recent one-man exhibitions have been held at Ink, Zurich; Stedelijk Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands; and Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

Jedd Garet was born in Los Angeles in 1955, and currently lives in New York. His paintings and sculpture have been included in the 1980 Venice Biennale and in one-man exhibitions at Felicity Samuels Gallery, London, and Robert Miller Gallery, New York.

Kim MacConnel was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1946, and now lives in Encinitas, California. His paintings on fabric and paper have been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and in one-man exhibitions at Holly Solomon Gallery, New York.

INTERVIEW

Quentin Vest, a poet, is now completing a year as a Fulbright lecturer in American literature at the University of Bucharest in Romania. He is a member of the Departments of English and Philosophy at Longwood College in Virginia.

William Crawford Woods, a novelist and journalist, is presently completing *Patch Wayfield's Nation,* a book of short fiction. He is a member of the Departments of English and Philosophy at Longwood College in Virginia.

FEATURE

Bobby Andersen has been involved in a number of projects over the past ten years, which include management of a small service business affiliated with a non-profit religious organization, involvement in self-improvement seminars for senior citizens, and work as an interior designer. He was nominated for the New York State Chamber of Commerce Commercial Interior Design Award. He lives in Brooklyn.

George Plimpton is an editor of *The Paris Review.* He is the author of many books, the most recent of which, *Shadow Box* (Putnam Books), appeared in 1978. He is co-author of a forthcoming biography of Edie Sedgwick.

Jean Stein conducted the William Faulkner interview for *The Paris Review* #12. She collaborated with George Plimpton on *American Journey: The Times of Robert Kennedy.* Her biography on Edie Sedgwick, edited by George Plimpton, will be published by Alfred A. Knopf. She lives in New York City.

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ADDENDUM

(The following contributor's note was omitted from issue 77.)
Hans Magnus Enzensberger is the author of two poems that appeared in *The Paris Review* issue 77, which came from his latest book, *The Sinking of the Titanic* (Houghton Mifflin). Mr. Enzensberger is a leading poet and critic in his native Germany, and has a large international audience. His recent books include *The Consciousness Industry, Raids and Reconstructions,* and *Mausoleum.*

***The Paris Review* is pleased to announce that Norman Lock is the winner of the 1979 Aga Khan Prize for Fiction for his story "The Love of Stanley Marvel & Claire Moon," which appeared in the Fall 1979 issue.**

Notice To Librarians

It has come to our attention that a number of recent issues of The Paris Review have carried incorrect volume numbers, causing some confusion among librarians. The following list indicates how the issues should properly be listed:

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73	Spring-Summer 1978	Vol. 20
74	Fall-Winter 1978	Vol. 20
75	Spring 1979	Vol. 21
76	Fall 1979	Vol. 21

It will be noted that Volumes 20 and 21 each consist of two issues. For clarity, we have deleted Volume 19 altogether. We regret whatever inconvenience has been caused by these errors.

The Editors

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